

Prince Albert
King-Consort
of Portugal

King of the
Belgians

Prince Ernest

The Queen

By Charles Hunt 1241

, T. W. J. Wood

T. A. P. F.

T. T. T.

UNCLE LEOPOLD

A Life of the First King of the Belgians

By

ANGUS HOLDEN

WITH 9 ILLUSTRATIONS

HUTCHINSON & CO.

(Publishers) Ltd.

LONDON

Made and Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.
1936

TO
JAMES MINNEY
IN GRATITUDE
FOR CONSTANT ENCOURAGEMENT AND ADVICE

I am most grateful to Mr. Gordon Bolitho for his kindness in correcting my proofs, and to Mr. Hector Bolitho for the original drawing of Princess Charlotte's tomb in Saint George's Chapel.

A. H.

P R E F A C E

“ If I lay my head in the lap of a Stockmar, I am safe.”

GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS

E NGLISH and Continental history during the last century is impregnated with the House of Coburg when, after many years of comparative obscurity, the younger or Ernestine branch of the Wettin family spread like an epidemic over the face of Europe. England, Belgium, Portugal and Roumania, all were ruled for varying periods by these ubiquitous people. Spain, on two occasions nearly accepted a Coburg King, while the crown of Greece was actually refused by Leopold, the most ambitious of them all. At different times, the Empresses of Germany, Brazil and Mexico were of Coburg origin and, towards the close of the century, a Coburger secured the throne of Bulgaria. Even the new world, apparently, felt their fascination, for one sanguine American once asked King Leopold if there was no available Coburger to assume the throne of the U.S.A. Whence came this urge and craving for power? What person or cause was responsible for the meteoric rise of the star of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha?

\ In 1787 there was born in the city of Coburg a boy called Christian Frederick Stockmar. Brought up to be a country doctor, he was destined to wield international power. This martyr to dyspepsia, this incorrigible hypochondriac, by his courage and foresight, his love of power and his hatred of publicity, wormed himself into a unique position in the secret Councils of European politics. Although Stockmar started life with few material advantages, yet in the House of Coburg he found a brilliant opening.

Leopold was his first pupil and instrument to power ;

docile, conscientious, clay in his hands. Albert, Leopold's nephew, was the second; equally malleable, equally conscientious: and through Albert, Stockmar dominated Victoria. For fifteen months before her marriage he reigned at Windsor in the Royal Household, advising, directing, ruling in matters where even Baroness Lehzen did not dare to tread.¹

Had Stockmar never been born, Leopold might have relapsed into obscurity after all his hopes had crumbled with the death of Princess Charlotte, ultimate heir to the English throne; without him, Albert might never have learnt that grim application and inexorable stability of purpose without which neither Leopold nor Stockmar would have considered him a possible consort for the Queen of England; and without Albert, Victoria might have been a shadow-Queen like Anne. Stockmar was truly the corner stone of the House of Coburg in the nineteenth century.

But behind that love of secret power, behind that passionate longing to see a united Germany under Prussia, lay principles, strong, urgent and inflexible. Integrity, sobriety, a sex morality, on the surface crystal clear, a firm show of adherence to any reformed religion, "lofty principles" cloaking a smug materialism; with all these new ideals his willing pupils were skilfully imbued. Indeed Stockmar may be called the architect of the Victorian age!

Then again, behind these principles lay the demon of work: work for its own sake, not as a means to an end, but as a virtue in itself. "Never relax," was Stockmar's melancholy motto and bravely his three pupils emblazoned that motto on their banners of life. Leopold and Victoria thrived on it, but Albert's strength was not sufficient to bear that remorseless burden. Work! At forty-two Albert was dead. "Never relax!" Well might Stockmar's motto have been inscribed on the Albert Memorial.

One may visualise Stockmar as the skilled driver of an obedient tandem. The leader is Leopold, an old and sagacious thoroughbred, with Albert, a promising youngster, behind. By the driver sits a plump little lady with an approving, affectionate smile. Her name is Victoria.

For twenty-five years this sombre but efficient equipage drives relentlessly through the plains and valleys of European politics. But the driver is too hard on the young horse Albert and he dies in harness : and a few years later the old horse and his driver die of a ripe old age. So the plump little lady has to walk on, alone. . . .

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CHAPTER ONE

“La grande affaire c’est le succès.”

LEOPOLD

LEOPOLD OF SAXE - COBURG - SAALFELD belonged to the House of Wettin, a family which, abandoning the districts around the Elbe in the first half of the eleventh century, was invested by the Emperor Lothair with the Margraviates of Meissen and Lausitz, an area roughly equivalent to the extent of modern Saxony. After three hundred years of external and internal warfare, during which the possessions of the Wettins, although increased, were frequently divided amongst the different members of the family, Saxony was united and ruled by Frederick the Bitten.

Early in the fourteenth century, this Prince earned his nickname from the celebrated occasion when his mother, about to be separated from her favourite son, bit Frederick in the right cheek, in an excess of maternal devotion! Although a fierce and successful warrior, Frederick the Bitten eventually succumbed to his extreme sensibility. One day in 1324 he witnessed a mystery play, in which the Ten Foolish Virgins, despite the intercession of Our Lady, were seen being thrust into Hell by the Devil. The melancholy produced by this edifying entertainment resulted in his sudden and lamented demise.

In 1485 a permanent settlement of the Wettin lands was made by the brothers Ernest and Albert. The latter, although the younger, received Misnia, modern Saxony, while Ernest's share was Thuringia, which included Coburg. At the Reformation, the Albertine branch supported Church and the integrity of the Empire, while the Ernestines, under Frederic the Wise, who had once refused the Imperial crown, supported Luther, and turned his

country Protestant. Frederic's nephew and successor, Frederic the Magnanimous, successfully resisted Charles V's determined efforts to subdue him, while his great-grandson, John William of Weimar, offered his hand to Queen Elizabeth. Had the Virgin Queen accepted this offer, the accession of the House of Coburg to the throne of England would have been anticipated by three hundred years.

The most distinguished Coburger in the seventeenth century was Ernest the Pious, who, besides gratifying his military and Protestant ardour by fighting under the banner of Gustavus Adolphus, was so enlightened, as to found free schools for the poor children in his domains. During the same century a vital decision was made by the Ernestines Wettins. It was decided that, in the future, there should be no further division of their lands, with the result that the cadets of the House from that time on were forced to seek their fortunes abroad. This arrangement was directly responsible for the wide profusion of Coburgers during the last century.

Coburg slumbered peacefully through the eighteenth century and shared in the general horror at the bloody violence of the French Revolution. Indeed, Frederick Josias, younger son of the reigning Duke Ernest Frederick, fought with the Austrians in the Low Countries, and was present at the French defeat at Neerwinden in 1793. Owing however to the pitiable exhibition of the English, under the Duke of York, the Allies were routed at Fleurus and driven out of Belgium.

While, however, Frederick Josias was making his ineffectual gesture in the Low Countries on behalf of European monarchy, a baby was born in his own country, whose throne and kingdom, forty years later, was to be regarded by most of the crowned heads as a festering sore in the body politic.

Leopold George Christian Frederick, the eighth child and the third son of Prince Francis, heir to the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, was born in Coburg on December 16th, 1790. The Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold II, was the first of the child's nine sponsors, and thus gave his name to the future ruler of the former Austrian Netherlands.



Leopold, aged twenty-eight. By J R Chwickshanks.

*"The desire for power was to Leopold an unconquerable passion
and the possession of it an essential stimulus to his being."*

Leopold's father, who succeeded to the dukedom in 1800, but died six years later, suffered all his life from delicate health but, according to his son, possessed a lovable character ; indeed, in later years Leopold described him as "affability itself." His mother, who was born Princess Augusta of Reuss-Ebersdorff, was a lively, sensible and intelligent woman, and according to Leopold her youngest child was "an uncommon woman, and worthy of respect."

Leopold's childhood is wrapped in an obscurity, inevitable to an eighth child of unimportant royalties, in a small German provincial town. He appears, however, from an early age, to have had the benefit of being educated by the Minister of Public Worship, Herr Holfender, by whom he was instructed in Christian doctrine and ethics. After confirmation he studied Latin and Russian, and on his own account added French and English to his curriculum. Perhaps, even at the age of ten, some unconscious urge prompted him to master those two languages, which, in the future, were to be of more service to Leopold than his mother tongue. He was also very carefully trained in the use of arms, a less important accomplishment for a nineteenth-century monarch ; his relaxations were music, botany and drawing.

Doubtless Leopold was a diligent and serious-minded pupil ; certainly he was a very pretty boy, and perhaps we can leave him for a short time in the care of Herr Holfender, while we turn to his brothers and sisters, none of whom, with one exception, played an outstanding rôle in Leopold's life.

Leopold's eldest brother, Ernest Anthony, was born in 1784, and he succeeded to the Duchy in 1806. For several years during the Napolconic Wars, he was a general in the Russian Horse Guards, and also attended the court of Frederick William III at Berlin. Except for a prudent alliance—he married Louise of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg in 1817, an heiress, who added Gotha to the Coburg domains—Ernest proved an unsatisfactory husband and head of the family. He was lax and a humbug, and although the father of the Prince Consort, he possessed none of the admirable conjugal qualities of his son, being faithless and unkind to his long-suffering although eccentric wife. On

one occasion when Ernest left her, however, they were brought forcibly together again, to their natural and mutual irritation, by the citizens of Coburg ; but these rough-and-ready methods could not prevail against a sinister and unexplained influence exercised by a certain aide-de-camp over the Duke's frivolous and unstable mind. In 1826 the Duchess Louise finally abandoned her impossible husband and succeeded, by her profligate behaviour, in compelling him to obtain a divorce. Subsequently both parties married again, the Duchess, who died in Paris in 1831, taking as her second husband a certain Graf von Pölzig, to whom she left a large annuity on the disturbing condition that he should never be parted from her corpse ! For years the unlucky Pölzig carried round with him the embalmed body of his dead wife, although he was by then married again, until one day, to his great consternation, he lost it. When, however, he found that his annuity continued to be paid to him he soon became reconciled to its loss.

Although Leopold appears to have been strangely unaffected by the distressing conduct of Ernest and Louise, Prince Albert never could forget his father and mother's discrediting life which led him to regard all sexual aberrations with genuine horror.

Leopold's second brother was Prince Ferdinand, who was born in 1785. Like his elder brother Ernest, he fought against Napoleon, serving for several years in the Austrian army. He is chiefly famous for his marriage to Princess Antoinette Kohary, an immensely rich heiress from Hungary. He founded the Coburg-Kohary family, becoming the father of the King Consort Ferdinand of Portugal and the great-grandfather of the ex-Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria.

Princess Sophia, Leopold's eldest sister, was born in 1778 and was the oldest of her family. For many years she lived near Bayreuth at the "Fantasie," where, to-day, "Wagnerians" can enjoy the most delicious "Forelle blau." This Princess married a French *émigré* called Count Emmanuel Pouilly, the founder of the Austrian family Pouilly-Mensdorf, and although she married definitely below her station, "Aunt Sophie" was probably Queen Victoria's favourite aunt.

In 1798, Leopold's second sister, Antoinette, married Duke Alexander of Wurtemberg, an officer in the Russian army. According to Leopold, she had great aptitude for command. Julia, his third sister, was married in 1796 to the Grand Duke Constantine, brother to the Tsar, a great match for a Coburger. Unfortunately this marriage was a complete failure and after six years of maltreatment and misery, Julia returned home. Leopold's fourth, favourite and most important, sister was Marie Louise Victoria (1786-1861), who as the widow of Emich Charles, Prince of Leningen, married in 1818 the Duke of Kent, father of Queen Victoria. The intimate connection as they grew older between Leopold and his youngest sister will be fully dealt with later on.

At the age of fifteen Leopold, was a very learned and handsome young man, with a tall, slender figure and broad shoulders, a high forehead, crowned with soft curls, a strong chin, perhaps a little too accentuated, and large brown, thoughtful eyes. He had an attractive voice with a slight but natural drawl. Although a serious-minded youth, Leopold was extremely pleased with his appearance, and his early love of uniforms remained with him throughout his life.

All his childhood Europe was at war, and no doubt Leopold would share with all good Germans a passionate desire to liberate his country from the menace of Napoleon. Indeed, in later days, Napoleon was heard to exclaim: "Wherever I go I find a Coburg in the ranks of my enemies." At any rate, at fifteen, Leopold determined to follow the example of his two elder brothers and to seek military service in either the Russian or Austrian armies, and, being a brother-in-law of the Grand Duke Constantine, he easily obtained a commission in the Russian cavalry. Leopold's first military adventure, however, ended abruptly, for he arrived at Russian headquarters a short time before the battle of Austerlitz (December 2nd, 1805). Whether or not Leopold took part in this battle is uncertain, but it is probable that, owing to his youth and inexperience, he was kept in the rear. At any rate he hastily returned to Coburg, which in the following year was absorbed into the French Empire.

The outlook at that time must indeed have appeared discouraging for the youngest son of an obscure and now dethroned royal family. But Leopold's mother, "that uncommon woman and worthy of respect," showed herself in a crisis to be worthy of a larger measure of praise. She hastened to establish cordial relations with Napoleon, and so successfully did she plead for Coburg that, by the Peace of Tilsit in 1807, the young Duke Ernest, who had just succeeded to his father, was restored to his full domains.

Filled with gratitude, young Leopold and his brother, the Duke, set out for Paris the same year to thank the Emperor for his generosity to their country. But, with Leopold, gratitude was not the only motive for the journey. He realised that, as a younger son, he would have to make his own way in life, and this necessity was accompanied by a deep and growing ambition for power and position.

The two German Princes were most warmly received by Napoleon, and later the Emperor said that Leopold was the most handsome young man he had ever seen at the Tuileries. But, unfortunately, Leopold was still in the service of the Tsar, and Napoleon made it immediately and abundantly clear that unless Leopold at once abandoned Russia, France would again occupy Coburg. Faced by this terrifying prospect Leopold hastened to comply, and his mind then naturally turned to the brilliant possibility of service under the Emperor. So much is clear, but whether Napoleon or Leopold was responsible for the final failure to come to terms is obscure. Leopold, later, definitely asserted that he had declined the Emperor's offer of a commission in the Imperial army. Napoleon, however, remarked in St. Helena: "This Prince Leopold might have been my aide-de-camp; he begged it of me; I don't know what prevented his appointment. It is very lucky for him he did not succeed." Which man spoke the truth? Naturally, after the fall of Napoleon, Leopold would not be anxious that the world should know that he had, at any time, toyed with the idea of serving the Emperor, while, in later years, Napoleon might easily forget his exact relations with an

unimportant German princeling during the height of his power. The probabilities, however, are that while the Emperor was prepared to give Leopold a commission the latter insisted on being appointed to the imperial staff, and when Napoleon refused, negotiations broke down.

Politics were not the only concern of the two young Coburg Princes while in Paris, and Duke Ernest managed to attach to his person a beautiful young Hellene called Pauline Panam who was known as "la belle Grecque." Infatuated by her charms, the Duke carried her away with him to Germany, whither she travelled in male attire and where she was installed in a small farm-house in the neighbourhood of Coburg. It is related, however, that Ernest's passion for this young lady was also reprehensively shared by Leopold who on one occasion forced his way into her bedroom at seven o'clock in the morning. His advances apparently were repulsed, and Pauline in her memoirs described the intruder somewhat harshly: "He was a tall young man with a false look and a disagreeable, sentimental smile. After having excused (in wretched French) his manner of introducing himself to my presence, he began to lament my fate and to fall foul of his brother." It is an unpleasant incident, if true, and was followed by a wild outburst of jealousy on Ernest's part when the matter came to his ears. Indeed, the doting Duke was only pacified when Pauline confided to him that in the fulness of time she hoped to become a mother.

Previous to this episode and while still in Paris Leopold had experienced more success with the ladies when he was allowed to relax in the congenial atmosphere of Malmaison, where Queen Hortense was then residing. It is in fact more than probable that this beautiful step-daughter of Napoleon assisted Leopold in his intricate transactions with the Emperor and consoled him with her favours for his failure to agree. Indeed there can be little doubt that Leopold was deeply disappointed with the results of his visit to Paris, for the prospect of serving Napoleon in 1806 was a brilliant one, and it is curious to think what Leopold's future would have been had he, in

that year, hitched his wagon to that still ascending meteor which, in less than ten years, was to vanish from the firmaments for ever.

Did Leopold regret his decision during the next few years of obscurity in Coburg? Did he ever picture himself a French General in the gorgeous uniform of the Imperial Guard? Unfortunately we do not know. Leopold was always most discreet about his relations with the Emperor Napoleon.

For the next six years Leopold lived chiefly in Coburg. These were trying years for this restless and ambitious young man, only to be broken by a further disappointment when in 1808, he decided to beard the Emperor again. The Congress of Erfurt was in progress and Leopold, on his arrival, was once again most cordially received by Napoleon. Feeling that it would be useless to ask a favour for himself, he asked one on behalf of his family. Would the Emperor grant an extension of territory to Coburg? Napoleon refused quite definitely and Leopold returned home, realising at last, that nothing more could be expected from the Emperor of the French.

From that time, Leopold drifted towards Russia, and later he claimed to have been the first German Prince to have joined the liberating armies in 1813. Even if this claim was justified, there was small credit in being one of the earliest vultures to gather round the dying body of imperial France. It must, however, be said in Leopold's defence that although he was not above asking, he never received any favours from Napoleon.

Leopold was present at Kalish in 1813 when the Alliance between Russia and Prussia was formed, and was given the command of an army corps of Russian cavalry. This remarkable confidence shown by the Allied Commanders towards a man of twenty-three with little, if any, experience of active service was, however, fully justified by Leopold's skilful handling of his command. After the battle of Bautzen he covered the retreat of the Allies into Silesia and subsequently attended the Congress of Prague, at which Napoleon unwisely declined to be satisfied with a France bounded by the Rhine, the Alps and the Meuse. Leopold fought gallantly and successfully in Kulm and

was decorated on the field of battle, although only with a third-class Russian order. He fought at the battle of Leipzig, and in January, 1814, he penetrated with his army corps through Switzerland into France and entered Paris with the Tsar on March 31st.

Of Leopold's activities during his stay in Paris little, unfortunately, is known. He is said, however, to have expressed the opinion that, in order firmly to establish the Bourbons on their rickety throne, a few heads should fall in the sand. This violent point of view is not at all in keeping with what is known of Leopold's humane character which, it can only be surmised, had been temporarily brutalised by war.

Amongst all the gaieties of Paris and the social opportunities of peace, Leopold did not forget his former friend, Queen Hortense, then, like all the Bonapartes, in perilous eclipse. Indeed, he went at once to visit her in the quiet of Malmaison where she was living in nervous apprehension of the future, with her eight-year-old son, Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Could he have foreseen, as he consoled with fair words and perhaps caresses, the former Queen of Holland and stepdaughter of the fallen Emperor that her pretty child was one day to become third Emperor of the French and a source of much anxiety to Leopold, first King of Belgium, the enjoyment of those frequent trips to Malmaison might definitely have been marred. As it was, Leopold proved a good friend to the unfortunate Queen, and it was owing to his efforts on her behalf, that Hortense was invested with the Dukedom of St. Leu and provided with an income of 400,000 livres a year.

In June, 1814, the foreign royalties left Paris and came to London. The Tsar, of course, brought a large retinue, amongst whom was Leopold. Alison, in his history of Europe, 1789 to 1815, maintains that Leopold's visit to London was by no means solely the result of his connection with Russia. According to this authority, Leopold, while in Paris, fell seriously in love with a certain alluring young lady, "then appearing in all the freshness of opening youth." She was related to an important English peer holding a high diplomatic position in Paris. This Lord

—, writes Alison, being aware of Leopold's impecunious and love-stricken condition, good-naturedly offered him the hospitality of his home in England, which Leopold accepted with gratitude and delight. Probably Lord — was not averse to a match between his pretty relative and a royal Prince, although Alison, as a contemporary, is too discreet to make such a suggestion, and even withholds the name of Lord — and the girl from his readers. "Those acquainted with the elevated circles of English society at that period," he writes, "will have no difficulty in filling them up." Unfortunately, very few of us are acquainted with them to-day.

The reception given by London to her distinguished visitors was lavish and gay, for all classes were united in their relief at the downfall of Napoleon, and the arrival of the sovereigns was an admirable opportunity for gratitude and display. Naturally, however, with such a host of visitors, accommodation was scarce in the fashionable quarters and royalties of minor consequence had to be content with humble lodgings. So Leopold, doubtless much to his surprise, found himself quartered over a green-grocer's shop in High Street, Marylebone. He was to some extent consoled, however, for this lack of grandeur by a pretty housemaid, who fell desperately in love with him on account of the fascinating droop of Leopold's eyelids when he bowed.

Whatever Leopold might think of Marylebone, he was certainly thrilled to be in London. Here was the opening he had so often desired. Coburg, Napoleon, even the Tsar, his present master, were forgotten in the glitter of limitless opportunities; and the fact that he was an unimportant German Prince, with only two hundred a year, did not for a moment damp Leopold's optimism. A self-analyst before it was the fashion, Leopold could assess his advantages to a nicety: extremely handsome, an attractive, suggestive manner, learning, common sense, and *savoir-faire*. Obviously he was destined to make a brilliant marriage, and as Leopold looked round the gay panorama of London in that June of 1814 his discerning eye immediately fell on the most important young lady in the land—Princess Charlotte Augusta, only child of the Prince



Princess Charlotte of Wales, aged twenty-one. By A. E. Chalon

*"Her fresh and unspoilt outlook had captivated him as much
as had her buxom and desirable body"*

Regent and Princess of Wales and the future Queen of England.

This unfortunate Princess was at that time eighteen years of age, having been born on January 7th, 1796, two months after which event her mother, in despair, abandoned Carlton House for Blackheath and never lived with her husband again. Charlotte's upbringing was deplorable, her life being spent between her erratic and ill-treated mother and her irascible, rakish and selfish father. In later life she once pathetically remarked : " My mother was bad, but she would not have become as bad as she was if my father had not been infinitely worse."

Home life as such, Charlotte had none. Warwick House, where she lived, could hardly warrant such a description, although she was fortunate in her faithful friend, Miss Cornelia Knight, nicknamed " Notti," a benevolent and tactful Admiral's daughter, and also in Miss Mercer Elphinstone, who was more of her own age. The handsome Sir Henry Halford was her doctor and provided what amenities he could in this unhappy circle.

The lamentable relations which existed between her parents naturally turned Charlotte's mind to thoughts of matrimony, and she is credited, at an early age, with an innocuous flirtation with William Spencer, sixth Duke of Devonshire, the son of the beautiful " Duchess Georgiana." Her father, however, frowned on the friendship and remarked grimly to the " Bachelor Duke," who normally took more interest in hot-houses than in ladies : " Your Grace will be good enough to recall the difference in rank between yourself and my daughter." Nevertheless, the Regent, who was excessively jealous of her popularity in the country, was most anxious to marry her at a youthful age to a foreign royalty in order to get her out of the way. Not unreasonably the prospect of the debauched and frivolous Regent ascending the throne was just as distasteful to the general public as Charlotte's ultimate succession was popular in every class of society. Naturally the thought of the innocent and downtrodden heiress to the English throne, suffering in silence between her hopeless parents and her acid old grandmother, Queen Charlotte, had an immense popular appeal

which Byron's famous couplets truthfully though ornately expressed :

“ Weep, daughter of a Royal line,
A Sire's disgrace, a realm's decay ;
Ah, happy if each tear of thine could
wash a father's fault away.

Weep, for thy tears are virtue's tears
Auspicious to these suffering isles ;
And be each drop in future years
Repaid thee by thy people's smiles.”

Such effusions were hardly likely to increase Charlotte's popularity with her father, who before Napoleon's downfall had decided to find her a husband, and his first prepossession in favour of Prince William of Orange, heir to the Dutch throne, hardened to a fixed determination when that Prince arrived in London in the summer of 1814. Such a match greatly appealed to the Regent, as forming a future and possibly a permanent alliance between England and Holland against France and enabling him to keep Charlotte out of the country until she should succeed to the English throne. Orange, naturally, was enchanted at the prospect of becoming one day Prince or even King Consort of Great Britain as well as King of Holland and enthusiastically agreed.

Charlotte, however, made difficulties from the first. To begin with, she was determined not to be exiled abroad, and secondly, she abominated the person of the Prince of Orange, who was a dissolute, untidy and stupid young man. He had, besides a wispy figure, a bilious face and an infuriating mania for shaking hands ; Lord Brougham aptly called him “ Young Frog.”

The prospect of being tied for life to this unappetising creature was, not unnaturally, so nauseating to Charlotte that she at once announced her intention of marrying her cousin, the Duke of Gloucester, who was nearly twenty years older than herself. But the Regent was adamant and insisted on Orange. “ I think him so ugly,” Charlotte once announced, “ that I am sometimes obliged to turn my head away in disgust when he is speaking to me,” and when her friend Miss Townshend informed her that her

brother was acting as aide-de-camp to the Prince of Orange, while the latter was in London, Charlotte remarked: "Indeed, poor brute, how I pity him."

The Regent's conduct towards his daughter was in fact callous in the extreme for he certainly had no love for Orange, whom he never forgave for becoming roaring drunk at a Court ball (usually an offence he gladly condoned), in consequence of which peccadillo, when Orange returned to London the next time, he was compelled to live over his tailors as the Regent declined to ask him to stay at Carlton House. However, married to his daughter, the Prince of Orange would serve his purpose, and Charlotte was ultimately forced to give her angry and reluctant consent to the engagement.

Such was the situation when Leopold arrived in London in that summer of 1814, but the fact that Charlotte was engaged, with the full consent of the Regent, did not in the least discourage Leopold in his determination to secure Charlotte for his bride. Naturally, he was well aware of his own attractions as opposed to the hideous Orange, but apart from Charlotte's desirable position Leopold at once realised that she possessed by no means an unpleasing person. She had a plump and appetising body, flaxen hair, bright, frank eyes and really lovely hands and feet. Her manners, however, were decidedly bad, a fact which could be attributed to the complete lack of parental restraint as a child. She was wont to stand with her hands behind her back and her stomach pushed well forward in the most "ungentle" manner. She would roar with loud laughter when amused, but stamp and swear when annoyed, which showed her lack of "sensibility." She thought little of slapping the face of an irritating lady-in-waiting or of using her whip on the back of her favourite groom, and, on one occasion, she tore off the wig of a bishop who enraged her.

Nearly thirty years later, long after poor Charlotte was dead, Leopold gave a retrospective description of her character in a letter to his niece, Queen Victoria. He admitted that she was a highly strung and violent creature, but insisted that her disposition "was highly generous and susceptible of great devotion." Leopold also added

the interesting information that, before her marriage to him, some people, unfortunately not specified, "by dint of flattery had tried to give her masculine tastes, and in short had pushed her to become one day a sort of Queen Elizabeth." Luckily the Princess was too fond of male society, whenever she could get it, to picture herself for long in the role of a Virgin Queen, for which she was fitted neither by temperament nor taste.

Lady Charlotte Burry gives an entertaining contemporary description of Princess Charlotte in her diary. "I have never known a more extraordinary person than the Princess," wrote Lady Charlotte. "Sometimes there is a vein of exalted sentiment in what she says and does that quite astonishes me and makes me rub my eyes and open my ears to know if it is the same person who condescends to talk low nonsense and sometimes even gross ribaldry." She was, however, completely devoid of malice, and the Princess' violence in word and deed was due to natural high spirits which nobody had considered his business to control. Such was the presence and character of Princess Charlotte of Wales in that hectic summer of 1814.

The occasion of Charlotte's first meeting with Leopold is, unfortunately, unchronicled, but shortly after his arrival in London Leopold was pointed out to Charlotte at a ball at Carlton House as being the admirer of a lady whom she knew. (Possibly Sir Archibald Alison's young lady!) Charlotte looked with curiosity in Leopold's direction and remarked that the lady in question should be deeply flattered by his attentions. This pointed comment was, no doubt, repeated to Leopold, who, encouraged by his fleeting success with the Princess, gave up his drab lodgings in the High Street, Marylebone—whether with regret or relief at deserting the love-stricken housemaid is unluckily unknown—and took more respectable rooms in Stratford Place. He also made a point of meeting Charlotte as often as possible when riding in the Park and of showing an obvious interest in her pleasing figure and fine horsemanship. Charlotte could hardly have failed to have been flattered by the appreciative and languorous glances of those serious brown eyes.

But it was not at first to Leopold that the Princess looked to save her from "Young Frog." Prince Frederick of Prussia was a fleeting favourite and, for a time, a keen partisan in the struggle against the Regent, who one day about the middle of June, committed a grave error of judgment with his daughter. Determined to accelerate her wedding with the Prince of Orange, the Regent sent her a list of the guests whom he intended to ask to the ceremony, at the same time inviting her opinion on his choice. As Charlotte's eyes ran down the list of familiar names she noticed with anger that the name of her mother had been omitted, obviously on purpose, as it was hardly likely that the Regent could have forgotten to include Charlotte's mother and his own wife. With considerable relish Charlotte then seized her pencil and crossed out the name of her fiancé, the Prince of Orange, and returned the list to her father. Charlotte knew, of course, that by this rash action the Regent would be beside himself with fury, but she determined to brave his anger and finally to break off her engagement with "Young Frog."

It was about this time that Charlotte's interest changed from Prince Frederick to Leopold. The reason for this fickleness is not known. Perhaps the pertinacity of the Coburger surpassed that of the Prussian. At any rate Leopold found an energetic ally in his pursuit of Charlotte in the person of the Grand Duchess Catharine of Russia, the widow of the Duke of Oldenburg, who was determined to break Charlotte's engagement to the Prince of Orange. The reasons the Grand Duchess had for her, then, apparently altruistic efforts on Leopold's behalf were subsequently explained when, two years later, her sister the Grand Duchess Anna was married to the Prince of Orange.

The stage was now set for the final scene of estrangement between Charlotte and her hated fiancé. An increasing abhorrence of Orange accentuated by his accepting invitations to balls at Carlton House to which she was not invited was accompanied by an increase of interest in Leopold which culminated at a ball given by her aunt the Duchess of York, an unexpected ally, with the object of enabling Charlotte and Leopold to become better

acquainted with each other. This simple ruse was most successful, for a few days later they were secretly engaged and Charlotte at once decided to pick a quarrel with the Prince of Orange for which a favourable opportunity arose almost immediately.

One day Charlotte and Orange had arranged to visit the mint together, an event to which the Prince eagerly looked forward, but at the last moment Charlotte changed her mind and announced her intention of going to the riding-school instead. Irritated for once, the Prince dug his toes in and Charlotte, jumping at the heaven-sent opportunity, flew into a towering rage, abused him roundly and told him that he could consider their engagement as irrevocably broken.

Extremely mortified, the Prince of Orange repaired to the Regent with whom, it appeared, Charlotte had omitted to reckon, and although it is improbable that Charlotte was so sanguine as to imagine that her father would calmly agree to the transference of her affections from the future King of Holland to the eighth child of an obscure German family, with only two hundred a year, she was certainly unprepared for the terrifying outburst of royal and paternal fury.

Immediately on learning of his daughter's rebellious conduct the Regent ordered that Charlotte should be confined indefinitely in Warwick House without permission to receive any visitors whatsoever. He also changed her ladies-in-waiting, and in place of the amiable "Notti" and the handsome Halford he installed the Ladies Rosslyn and Ilchester and the two Misses Coates (hostile ladies of unbending severity), with the strictest orders to supervise every detail of Charlotte's life.

The Princess was naturally appalled by the magnitude of her punishment, and although she bravely refused to renew her engagement with Orange she wisely refrained from urging Leopold's claims as a desirable suitor for her hand. Leopold, meanwhile, was lying very low, and probably he was wondering whether his ambitions were not to be totally crushed by the wrath and violence of the Regent. Charlotte's further indiscreet behaviour did not tend to reassure him.

One hot evening in July, Charlotte decided to end her hated confinement and she chose a drastic manner. Managing to elude for a moment the eagle eyes of her four wardresses, she slipped out of Warwick House and, jumping into a passing conveyance, she ordered the driver to take her to her mother's house in Connaught Place. The Princess of Wales was naturally enchanted to see her daughter from whom she was forcibly separated by the Regent, and being a particularly foolish woman probably imagined that the reunion would be permanent. The Regent, of course, held other views, and on hearing the startling news was naturally livid at his daughter's effrontery and immediately despatched his royal brothers and the Bishop of Salisbury to bring her back to Warwick House. It was only blind hatred of his wife which prevented the Regent from arriving in person in Connaught Place. Poor Charlotte was, of course, horrified at the prospect of returning home and facing her furious father ; she kept up a fierce resistance to the blandishments of her uncles, who arrived singly during the night, much alarmed and confused, until five o'clock in the morning. At last, however, she tearfully gave way and was driven back to Warwick House.

The reception Charlotte received from her four ladies who had been treated to a terrifying exhibition of the Regent's wrath can only be surmised, but her punishment for defying her father was literally prison life. Not only was she forbidden to see anyone, but she was not even allowed to write letters, while as a supreme penance, one of her ladies was ordered always to share her bed. Shortly after this escapade Charlotte was removed to Cranbourne Lodge in Windsor Forest and passed September in Weymouth under the strictest supervision and in the sole company of her four antipathetic ladies.

These distressing scenes and the Regent's brutal treatment of his wife and daughter naturally caused the Princess of Wales to rise like a rocket in popular favour. Poor Charlotte was well out of reach of any manifestations of sympathy, but Caroline was in London, very active and visible, and one night, returning from the opera, she was escorted home by a wildly enthusiastic crowd. Outside

Carlton House her carriage became jammed amongst her supporters who almost deafened her with their cries. "Long live the Princess of Wales. . . . Long live the innocent. . . . God bless you, we will make the Prince love you before we have done with him." Poor neglected Caroline must have felt heartened indeed, but the offer of the mob to burn Carlton House then and there she felt was going a little too far. "No, my good people, be quite quiet," she answered with unwonted reticence, "let me pass, and go home to your beds." Obediently, the crowd dispersed and Caroline drove on, content.

Encouraging, however, as these popular outbursts may have been for Caroline and Charlotte, they were small consolation for Leopold, who knew that anyhow for the moment Charlotte was well out of his reach. He also realised that an offer made for her hand at present would greatly damage his cause with the exacerbad Regent. He therefore decided discreetly to disappear from London. Leopold, however, had no need to feel depressed for he had so successfully ingratiated himself with Princess Charlotte that she had already signified her willingness to marry him when circumstances and her father might permit. He also had powerful allies in the Gloucesters and in the Duke of Kent, and the latter had not only promised to plead his suit with the Regent, but also to convey to Charlotte any communications he might wish to send her. Nevertheless, Leopold's future position in England was far from assured, although he was to prove himself a tenacious optimist with the power to wait. "Heaven," remarked Leopold, "had been graciously pleased to grant me two qualities, courage and patience; and I reckon on turning them to account."

CHAPTER TWO

"Do not suppose that to marry Prince Leopold I could or ever would consent to be Mrs. Coburg."

CHARLOTTE

THE year 1815 was a melancholy year for Princess Charlotte of Wales. The rigorous imprisonment continued under the same oppressive ladies, and not even the victory of Waterloo could soften the wrath of an indignant father towards her. Warwick House, Cranbourne Lodge, Weymouth . . . a grim rotation and only smuggled letters from Leopold to console her. She was fortunate, however, this year in not seeing her father once.

Leopold meanwhile, was having a much gayier time at the Congress of Vienna, where at a performance of amateur theatricals, he was given the part of Jupiter in a *tableau vivant*, representing the Gods on Olympus, an assembly which the Congress was supposed to recall. The views of Wellington and Metternich on Leopold's audacity in thus assuming the chief role are, unfortunately, unknown.

Despite these dissipations, however, Leopold managed to keep up a frequent and ardent correspondence with Charlotte through his intermediary the Duke of Kent, who, together with the Gloucesters and the Lords Castle-reagh and Anglesey, firm friends of the Princess, was ceaselessly plaguing the Regent to give his consent to her betrothal to Leopold. Throughout the whole of 1815, however, the Regent remained adamant; he angrily declined to consider such a fatuous proposal.

After Vienna and the unpleasant interlude of the Hundred Days, during which Leopold showed no particular inclination for further military renown, he returned to Coburg, where perhaps the most momentous event in

his life occurred. He became intimate with Christian Frederick Stockmar, the future inspirer and director of his career.

Stockmar, at that time, a young doctor of twenty-eight, was the second son of a small and inconsequential lawyer in Coburg, although the family came of an old and reputable stock. He selected medicine as his career, and having studied at the Universities of Jena, Erlangen and Wurzburg, young Stockmar took his degree. Years later, he wrote of those University days and of the importance he attached to those early studies; "it was a clever stroke to have originally studied medicine . . . without the psychological and physiological experiences which I thus obtained my *savoir-faire* would often have gone a-begging." Certainly Stockmar became a most skilled diagnoser of complicated political situations, but unfortunately, he was always convinced that his remedy was unique and infallible.

During 1812 Stockmar was running a military hospital in Worms, where he met Leopold, casually, for the first time. Here Stockmar worked in the most altruistic spirit during the last few years of the Napoleonic wars, and, declining to acknowledge any difference between wounded friends and enemies, he admitted into his hospital so many French soldiers after the Retreat from Moscow, that no room could later be found for the wounded of his own nation. Although adversely criticised by Baron Stein for this disinterested action, he remained unmoved and even went so far as to insist on open windows in his hospital, for which point of view he was very naturally considered a lunatic.

Stockmar's true character and guiding motives have always remained somewhat of a mystery, despite the admirable memoirs compiled by his son some fifty years ago, but certain peculiarities in the strange disposition of this rather sinister figure have become clear in the light of history.

Like many others,¹ Stockmar's character was largely formed by his health. A martyr to dyspepsia at an early age, with a permanent affection of his eyes, Stockmar was bitterly determined to overcome these painful and hindering afflictions. His manner also was inevitably influenced



Baron Christian Frederick Stockmar, aged about fifty.
By Winterhalter.

"The corner-stone of the house of Coburg in the nineteenth century."

by his weak constitution, and, although sometimes he would show a gay and exuberant side to his nature (incidentally Stockmar had shocking table manners) in general, he was a stern and dour companion. An ever-present fear of illness early turned him into a confirmed hypochondriac, although he managed to live without difficulty until he was over seventy-five.

Despite these mental and physical drawbacks, Stockmar was gifted with courage, foresight and a remarkable memory, while his unlimited capacity for intrigue was concealed under a blunt and outspoken manner. He was a demon for work, and possessed a boundless ambition to secure influence and political power, although fame and publicity were anathema to his practical and secretive mind. Apart from his desire for personal power, Stockmar's principal political ambition, dating no doubt from before Napoleon's fall, was to unite Germany under the domination of Prussia and to ally that united Germany with England.

In craft and capacity, a younger though worthy contemporary of Talleyrand and Metternich, but lacking their eighteenth-century culture and spirit, Stockmar's outlook was also an early but faithful example of the self-righteous materialism of the early Victorian age.

The friendship formed between Leopold and Stockmar, during those winters in Coburg, was indeed highly propitious for both. For Stockmar it provided an opening for his ambitions and a screen behind which he could, in the future, wield his immense and secret power. For Leopold, it furnished him with a lifelong and invaluable friend, whose influence over him was so to increase with the years, until in outlook and energy Stockmar and Leopold and later on the luckless Albert were to think, scheme and work, like one man.

Meanwhile, in England, 1816 dawned more propitiously for Charlotte. Gradually the Regent began to weaken under the pressure brought to bear on him by Charlotte's uncles and friends and, in January of the new year, Charlotte was summoned to Brighton by her father. The prospect of close quarters with the irascible Regent can hardly have been an alluring one for his daughter, until

she was informed, on her arrival, that he was prepared to give his royal and paternal consent to her marriage with Leopold. After all the years of misery and constraint at last she was to be allowed to marry the man she loved ! Poor Charlotte was wild with joy.

The formal announcement of Charlotte's engagement gave immense pleasure to the English people, who hoped that, by her marriage, their idol would escape from the odious tyranny of her father. The English Royal Family, especially the repellent old Queen Charlotte, was cold and disdainful in its reception of the good news, while abroad jealousy was mingled with surprise at the unexpected success of the ambitious young Coburger. The engagement had repercussions, even in literary circles, and it was suggested to Miss Austen by the Regent's librarian, Mr. Clarke, that she should write a romance illustrating the history of the House of Coburg. The Regent himself was a great admirer of this lady's work, which showed an unexpected discernment in an age dominated by the flamboyance of Lord Byron and, on his request, the retiring authoress had dedicated "Emma" to her royal patron. But Miss Austen firmly declined to write a romance on the House of Coburg. Her reply to Mr. Clarke's suggestion was a pattern of wisdom and modesty : "I am fully sensible that an historical romance founded on the House of Saxe-Coburg might be much more to the purpose of profit or popularity than such pictures of domestic life in country villages as I deal in. But I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. . . . No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way ; and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other."

His mind once made up, the Regent had no intention of having Charlotte on his hands longer than he could possibly help, so he decided that the marriage should be solemnised in May and sent post-haste to Coburg to summon Leopold. No time was wasted in preparations or farewells and, on February 23rd, Leopold arrived at the Pavilion in Brighton, protected from the cold by a long skirted coat, a muff and a feather boa.

Whether it was owing to these rather unusual safe-

guards against the rigours of a Brighton winter, or else to a distaste for Leopold's serious and high-minded outlook, his future son-in-law did not receive a particularly encouraging welcome from the Regent. His Royal Highness was very fond of giving nicknames to those who displeased him, considerably less flattering than his own, "the first gentleman of Europe," and Leopold became a favourite target for the shafts of the royal wit. "King Sneak" was the Regent's first invention, a malicious and unfair insinuation, although the "Marquis peu à peu," a later nickname, came nearer to the truth. The Regent, however, put Leopold wise regarding his daughter's obstinate character. "If you don't resist," he warned him, "she will govern you with a high hand."

The two months which decency, but not the Regent, demanded should elapse before the wedding was not an easy time for Leopold. Although he was dizzy with his success and found Charlotte an amiable though somewhat boisterous fiancée, Leopold was too intelligent not to foresee the rocks ahead. Naturally owing to his foreign origin, he had to expect general hostility in the country, and to anticipate the sneers of the English Royal Family, as well as of the aristocracy, on account of his lack of money and of his comparative unimportance in Germany. Besides which, he cannot have forgotten the anomalous position he would hold when Charlotte came to the throne. These present and future difficulties were, however, in a measure compensated for by the generous annual allowance of £50,000 a year voted by Parliament, as the future husband of Princess Charlotte and by the gift of Claremont House bought by the Commissioners of Woods and Forests from Mr. Charles Rose Ellis for £69,000, together with a park of two hundred acres "ornamented," according to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, "with a profusion of stately timber." The grandeur of his new position, however, did not blind Leopold to its inevitable embarrassments and, requiring more support, he decided to bring Stockmar over from Coburg.

The realisation that he was essential to Leopold was balm to Stockmar's soul. On the announcement of Leopold's engagement, inevitably he had been afflicted

with doubts as to his own future, fearing he would be called on to play no part in his friend's new life in England. But here was proof abundant that the little doctor from Coburg was definitely needed by the fiancé of England's future Queen. Small wonder that he called Leopold "his gracious master" !

Of Stockmar's activities on his first arrival in this country nothing is known, a fact which confirms his lifelong reputation for self-effacement, but obviously he was well content to be with Leopold. "He is a glorious master," he wrote that year, "a manly Prince and a princely man." Quietly, no doubt, Stockmar was beginning to find his feet, make his first impressions and consolidate his position with Leopold. Of his impressions, he fortunately kept a careful and detailed record, and they are anything but flattering to Princess Charlotte and the Royal Family. Of the Princess he wrote in his diary, May, 1816 : "She was handsomer than I expected, with most peculiar manners, her hands generally folded behind her, her body always pushed forward, never standing quiet, from time to time stamping her foot, laughing a great deal and talking still more . . . my first impression was not favourable." In October of the same year, after her marriage, he was, however, able to add : "Inter-course with her husband has, however, had a markedly good effect upon her."

The various members of the Royal Family are described by the acid Stockmar as follows :

Queen Charlotte. "Small and crooked, with a true Mulatto face."

The Regent. "Very stout, though of a fine figure. . . . He ate and drank a good deal at dinner. His brown scratch wig not particularly becoming."

Duke of York. "Tall with immense embonpoint and not proportionately strong legs. He holds himself in such a way that one is always afraid he will tumble over backwards. One can see that . . . sensual pleasures are everything to him. Spoke a great deal of French with a bad accent."

Duchess of York (daughter of Frederick William II of Prussia). "A little animated woman, talks immensely

and laughs still more. No beauty, mouth and teeth bad."

Duke of Clarence. "The smallest and least good-looking of the brothers, decidedly like his mother, as talkative as the rest."

Duke of Kent. "A large, powerful man ; like the King, as bald as anyone can be."

Probably at the time Stockmar was unaware that the future father of Queen Victoria was both a Sadist and a Martinet.

Duke of Cumberland. "A tall, powerful man with a hideous face . . . one eye turned quite out of its place."

Duke of Gloucester. "Prominent meaningless eyes . . . a very unpleasant face with an animal expression . . . he wears a neck-cloth higher than his head."

While Stockmar was busily looking round and making notes, the preparations for the wedding were being hurried on as quickly as possible. The Regent would brook no delay. His daughter was definitely an encumbrance, if not a danger to him. Any moment, he felt, owing to her popularity, Charlotte might become a centre of resistance to his power. Young, innocent and handsome, she was in every way the complete antithesis to her obese, ageing and prurient papa. "Prinny has let loose his belly," wrote Creevey about this time of the Regent, "which now reaches to his knees. Otherwise he is said to be well." No wonder the Regent wanted to be rid of his fresh and buxom daughter and her restrained and elegant fiancé.

At ten o'clock in the morning on May 2nd, 1816, Charlotte and Leopold's wedding day, a dense crowd gathered outside Clarence House, where Leopold was staying, and cheered with vociferous determination ; good-natured, half-amused, half-inquisitive ; a real English crowd. The object of their enthusiasm waited a respectable interval, then there appeared a fine dark strong young man with side-whiskers, dressed in a blue tail-coat with a high velvet collar, a buff silk waistcoat embroidered with flowers, and tight grey trousers strapped under his shoes. Leopold was overwhelmed with his reception, the crowd enchanted with their future Prince and, from ten to five Leopold was compelled by their endless cheering to make

frequent bows of gratitude on the balcony of Clarence House. He then retired to prepare for his marriage and, according to the *Observer*, published three days after the wedding, assumed for the ceremony a British General's embroidered uniform coat, white Kerseymere waistcoat and breeches. "His Serene Highness also wore a superb sword and belt which was presented to him by Her Majesty. The hilt of the sword was decorated with diamonds of uncommon lustre and the belt studded with costly gems."

Meanwhile, Princess Charlotte was giving a sitting to the Italian sculptor Turnerelli, who was engaged in making an effigy of her bust. When the sitting was over, she returned to Queen Charlotte to repose and also to prepare for the wedding. It is not difficult to imagine the disturbing and even alarming nature of the advice given to her granddaughter by this acid and interfering old woman. Soured by the madness of her husband and the excesses of her sons, the Queen viewed with anything but favour Charlotte's prospects of married bliss, and as events a few hours later were to prove, she must have been contriving in her savage old mind one last thrust at Charlotte's happiness.

Her grandmother's unsolicited advice ended at last, Charlotte was able to retire and dress for her marriage. *La Belle Assemblée* of the following June gave a delightful description of the Princess' appearance and dress on this auspicious occasion. "As we have been gratified with a sight of the wedding dress of this amiable and illustrious female a particular yet concise account of them cannot but be acceptable to our fair readers," began the article. "The Royal bride . . . wore on her countenance that tranquil and chastened joy which a female so situated could not fail to experience. Her fine fair hair, elegantly yet simply arranged, owed more to its natural beautiful wave than to the art of the friseur; it was crowned with a superb wreath of brilliants, forming rose-buds with their leaves.

"Her dress was silver lamé on net over a silver tissue slip, embroidered at the bottom with silver lamé in shells and flowers. . . . The manteau was of silver tissue lined



Leopold and Charlotte on their wedding day, May 2nd, 1816

"The Royal Bride wore on her countenance that tranquil and chastened joy which a female so situated could not fail to experience."

Extract from "La Belle Assemblée."

with white satin . . . and fastened in front with a splendid diamond ornament. Such was the bridal dress . . . on this happy occasion."

Shortly before eight o'clock, Princess Charlotte set out for Carlton House in the company of the Ladies Rosslyn and Ilchester. Outside the house, a large crowd had collected and Lady Rosslyn, at the door, begged the Princess to behave with decorum in the public gaze. Upon which Charlotte picked up her dress and hopped to the carriage on one leg, to the immense delight of the onlookers. When Lady Rosslyn protested vigorously against this undignified behaviour, the bride, remarking that hopping was the best means of showing her happiness, proceeded to hop to her front door and back again. Fortunately Leopold was not present to witness this disedifying behaviour.

The cortège arrived punctually at Carlton House. "Bless me, what a crowd," remarked the Princess as she entered the Great Crimson Room, which had been prepared for the ceremony. The temporary altar with its gold plate was also draped in crimson silk, and while the prayer books had been borrowed from the Chapel Royal at St. James', the candlesticks and plate had been purloined from the military chapel in Whitehall.

Princess Charlotte approached the altar on the arm of her aunt, the Princess Augusta (1768-1840), George III's second and best-looking daughter who, owing to the jealousy and selfishness of her father, was compelled to remain an official virgin for the seventy odd years of her life. The marriage ceremony was short, Leopold answering the responses in a very low and diffident tone. Charlotte, however, did not share his bashfulness, for thirty years later, Leopold, writing to his niece Queen Victoria, recorded that "people were much struck with the clearness and firmness with which she pronounced 'and obey' as there had been a general belief that it would be for the husband to give these promises." As regards Leopold, no doubt he wished to give an impression of gratitude and humility and the former was certainly sincere. Surrounded by the splendour and riches of the English Court, Leopold, an intelligent and sensitive young

man, must have realised the inherent weakness of his position; a weakness no reasonable man can fail to resent on being married to a woman immeasurably superior to himself both in station and wealth.

The ceremony over, Charlotte retired to change into her "going-away" dress; a white satin pelisse, stiff and straight, with an ermine border and a white satin bonnet with a swaying feather perched on the crown. Leopold, having discarded, no doubt reluctantly, his uniform of an English General, would probably be wearing a long-skirted and tightly waisted blue cloth overcoat—it was only early May and Leopold hated the cold—and on his head, a high and slanting beaver hat in fawn or grey. A handsome, radiant couple, they stood on the doorstep of Carlton House in the flickering torch-light ready to start for Oatlands, near Weybridge, lent them by the Yorks for the first part of the honeymoon. The dyspeptic old Queen was naturally there to see them off; her last moment to interfere, she knew, had arrived. Married, Charlotte would be free from her grandmother's sway, but a last thrust was still within her power. Queen Charlotte ordered Mrs. Campbell, a lady-in-waiting, to accompany the young married couple as far as Oatlands. It was improper, asserted Her Majesty, for Charlotte and Leopold to be left alone. Mrs. Campbell bravely and wisely refused. Queen Charlotte had played her last card. "Leg of mutton," the Princess later remarked, "is as little to my taste as my grandmother."

Honeymooning at Oatlands in May, then somewhat incongruously to our ideas, returning to London for August at Camelford House, Park Lane, they did not reach Claremont until the summer was nearly over. "Well, thank Heaven I am here at last," remarked Charlotte on arriving. She was radiantly happy. But even during their honeymoon, Charlotte had not been so engrossed with Leopold as to forget the wisdom of courting popularity with her future subjects. In anticipation of the actions of modern Royalty, she decreed that her establishment must wear only articles of British manufacture, and informed her dressmakers that no foreign materials should, on any account, be used on pain

of incurring her displeasure and being no longer employed.

Of that brief year of domestic bliss at Claremont only a few details have unfortunately survived. But the first essential to married happiness was certainly there, for Leopold, who had undoubtedly courted Charlotte because of her dazzling position, was now genuinely in love with his gay and desirable wife. But they were, in fact, a curious pair of opposites. Leopold was gentle and grave; Charlotte rough and light-hearted. While Leopold always reflected, Charlotte would act on the spur of the moment. Leopold's manners were perfect (he regarded himself as *de la fleur des Pois* of correct behaviour), Charlotte's language and deportment left much to be desired. But on the physical side of matrimony they must have undoubtedly agreed. Charlotte was a robust and sensuous woman; Leopold was an exceptionally amorous man, who, through a long life, did not attempt to disguise either his capacity or desire for sexual indulgence. Anyhow, according to the cold and scrutinous Stockmar, marriage did Charlotte the world of good.

Then there were other amusements. "Coco," the parrot, was an intelligent and vivacious bird and loved his "sops." And how Leopold enjoyed the soothing sensation of Charlotte combing his hair! It is pleasant to think that Leopold's elaborate "wind-swept" coiffure, with which contemporary prints have made us familiar, was arranged by the skilful and loving hands of his wife.

But probably such light moments were comparatively rare, for Stockmar was in residence at Claremont. The inflexible and humourless Baron (actually an 1821 and German creation) was unconsciously securing with Leopold his invaluable experience for moulding the life and character of his unborn masterpiece, Albert the Good. Naturally, Stockmar was dissatisfied with Princess Charlotte. How could such violent and sometimes even gross behaviour be tolerated in the person of the future Queen of England? Who could forget, for instance, that distressing incident when Duke Prosper of Aremberg called on the Princess? During the interview, Her Royal Highness had been far from courteous and had given way to

shouts of vulgar laughter, even before the Duke had withdrawn from the room, while her excuse for such ungenteel behaviour, that the Duke was a "hideous little mannikin," was extremely unrefined. No, decided Stockmar, the manners of Princess Charlotte left much to be desired.

So Leopold obediently set to work to reform his bride, and probably the task was not always an easy one. Sometimes, Charlotte would reply to his earnest remonstrances : "If you wish it, I will do it," and Leopold would answer in the words of an early Victorian Mama : "I want nothing for myself. When I press something on you it is from a conviction that it is for your interest and for your good." Again, if Charlotte raised her voice without need, or slapped her thighs in an excess of girlish zeal : "*Doucement ma chère, doucement,*" Leopold would gently murmur, hoping perhaps, that the limpid syllables of a language foreign to them both, might succeed in calming her when English and German had already failed. Anyhow, Leopold made such frequent use of this injunction that Charlotte nicknamed him "*Doucement,*" for, like her father the Regent, she had a passion for nicknames and was an admirable mimic.

Nearly twenty-five years later, Leopold described these tussles with his high-spirited wife in a letter to his niece Victoria : "The most difficult task I had was to change her manners," he wrote, and added with unbounded vanity, "but I had the manners of the best society in Europe. . . . Anyhow, Charlotte's manners were quite changed within a year's time to the . . . satisfaction of the very fastidious and not over partial Regent." Obviously Charlotte was often a trial to her earnest husband, whose ideals and culture contrasted strangely with her own, but Leopold loved her dearly, despite her uncouth ways and flippant points of view. After many months of marriage he joyfully exclaimed : "My Charlotte is an amiable and glorious little woman."

Life at Claremont, however, was not entirely domestic. The Duke of Wellington was a firm friend of the future English monarchs and a frequent visitor, and Stockmar disapprovingly noted that the Duke was in the habit of

whispering doubtful stories to the Princess at table which caused her much vociferous entertainment. The Lords Castlereagh and Anglesey kept Leopold informed of the political situation, while Countess Lieven, the thin and prying wife of the Russian Ambassador, imparted all the social gossip into Charlotte's eager ears. Once a most distinguished visitor proposed himself to stay : the Grand Duke Nicholas, later Tsar of all the Russias. This eccentric individual, when staying at Claremont, insisted on spending the night in the stables on a sack of hay, a procedure which Stockmar stigmatised as an affectation.

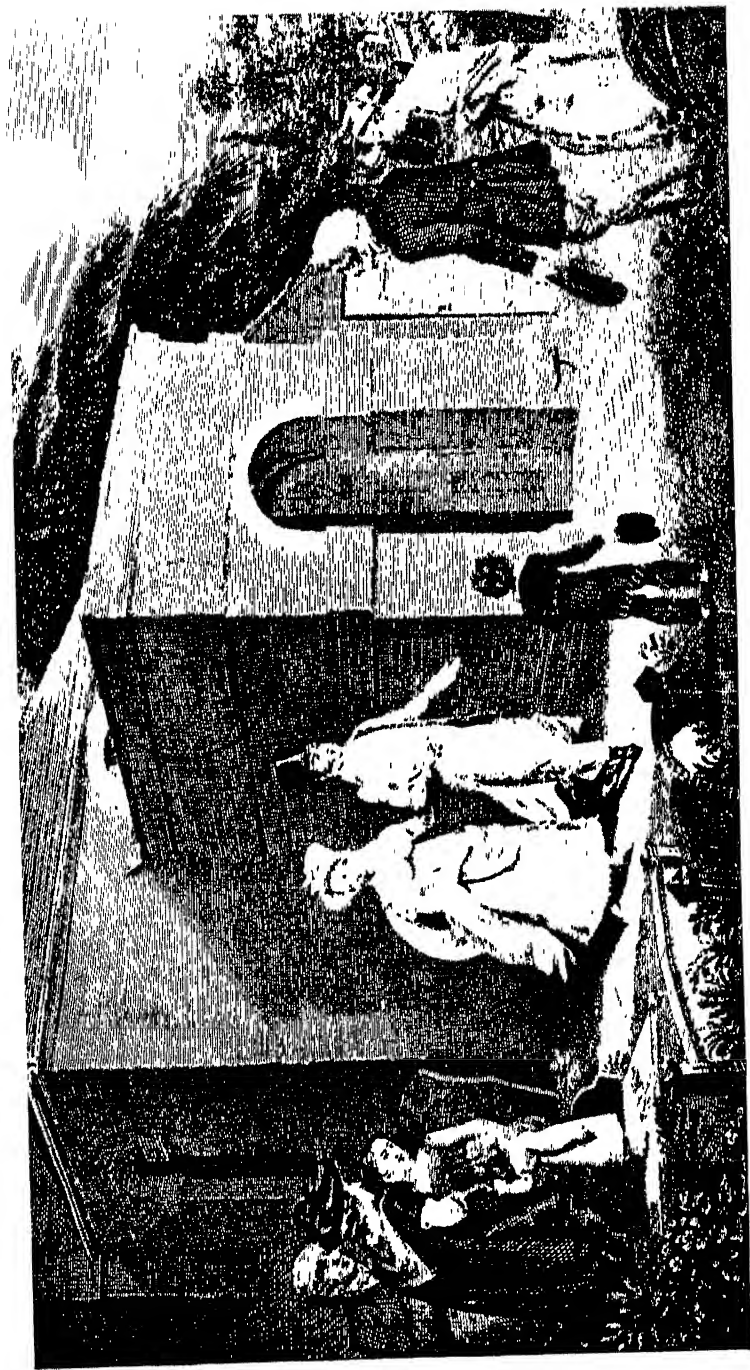
Amongst less exalted guests, and in Charlotte's opinion a most unwelcome one, was a certain Lady Maryborough to whom Leopold was greatly attached. Although she was fifteen years older than himself and, the friendship was merely platonic, Charlotte was immensely jealous, and once when Leopold reproved her for her childish point of view, the Princess angrily replied : " It is not (childish) . . . she is a very coquettish, dissipated woman." But these rare little scenes only served, as was natural, to stimulate their mutual affection.

In May, 1817, the affairs of the happy couple at Claremont became a matter of vital importance to the whole nation. It was now universally known that the Princess was with child. A great-grandchild was to be born in the direct succession to the mad old King, George III, who had by then reigned close upon sixty years ; a grandchild to reassure the Regent that none of his grasping brothers should ever succeed him on the throne ; a child (who cared if it should be a girl ?) was to be born to Charlotte and Leopold, the most popular couple in the United Kingdom.

Although the peak of the Regent's unpopularity was only later reached with the scandal of his wife's trial and her subsequent and undignified efforts to secure admission into the Abbey in order to be crowned, Charlotte's father had for long been generally and deservedly loathed, while the virtues of her ill-treated but imprudent mother, Caroline, had been universally but not quite justifiably acclaimed. Caroline, Charlotte and Leopold now formed a trinity of perfection in the eyes of the people. Indeed

sentimental, political and economic reasons now drew the eager attention of the nation to Claremont. What a contrast between the mad old King, dead for decades to his people, with his depraved and pot-bellied son, the Regent, and the handsome, blissful couple at Claremont, quietly awaiting the birth of the future King or Queen of England ! Now at last the succession had been assured ; new hope, new life spread through the depressed and war-weary, disillusioned masses. Even the low state of English finance reacted to the prospect of Charlotte's child. A boy, it was confidently predicted, would raise the funds six points on the Stock Exchange, while even a girl would mean a welcome rise of two and a half.

Meanwhile, Charlotte was quietly awaiting her confinement at Claremont. Sir Thomas Lawrence was engaged in painting her portrait, and Leopold was always at hand, grave, beautiful and reassuring. No doubt he would point out their joint responsibilities as future monarchs, future parents they could hope, of the future Prince of Wales. Charlotte, in a gay moment, may perhaps have asked her husband to suggest some possible names for "little Leopold." "George," the future father would certainly have replied as a loyal though critical son-in-law. Charlotte would have demurred ; Papa had done nothing to deserve such an honour. "What about William, after Uncle Clarence ?" Charlotte may have suggested, as an alternative. Undoubtedly this would have been vetoed by Leopold, who later is known to have said of the Duke of Clarence : "It saddens one to think that he might possibly come to the throne." "Augustus ?" Charlotte may have then proposed after "Uncle Sussex." Then Leopold would have reminded her firmly that the Duke was unfortunately a Radical. So in the end they would have had to agree to George. It would certainly please the Regent and, after all, who could ever remember a time when the King of England had not been called George ? So as Charlotte and Leopold rested in the shade of their giant cedar, or wandered down the narrow alleys banked with pink pearl and ponticum to the "Cottage Déjeuner," by the lake-side, they must have talked eagerly of their son's future ; in their enthusiasm they would probably



Leopold and Charlotte going to Church at Esher

.. *The most popular couple in the United Kingdom* ,

forget the possibility of a daughter ; Prince George at birth, later Prince of Wales and one day "George V" (D.V.) !

Stockmar has given a charming description of that happy summer at Claremont : "In this house reigns harmony, peace and love. My master is the best of all husbands in all the four quarters of the globe and his wife bears him an amount of love, the greatness of which can only be compared with the English National Debt." Stockmar was a partial witness, but certainly a truthful one, of the deep love that Charlotte and Leopold bore for each other. At the same time Stockmar wrote a rather querulous and pathetic note about himself : "Surrounded by all the noise of the fashionable world I am solitary, often alone for days together."

Then as summer faded into autumn, and the tired, drooping leaves began to change their verdure for gilded bronze, two pompous and self-satisfied gentlemen arrived at Claremont ; Dr. Baillie, the practitioner, and the accoucheur, Sir Richard Croft. The latter was old-fashioned in his methods even for the period in which he lived, a circumstance not unique amongst doctors in attendance on Royalty in every age. He also had a passionate belief in bleeding expectant mothers and was a strong opponent to their taking nourishment. "It is better for you not to eat," he would inform Princess Charlotte, who had the most voracious and healthy appetite. Then, if the pangs of hunger became unbearable, reluctantly Sir Richard would consent to his Royal patient consuming some bread and butter ; no other substance was ever allowed. Sir Richard was also bitterly opposed to the Princess wearing corsets, no doubt a suggestion made by her friends. "A cow does not wear stays," thundered Sir Richard, "why should the Princess Charlotte ?" His reasoning seems irrelevant but his hypothesis sound.

Stockmar's position towards the doctors was not an easy one. Officially he was Leopold's physician, and incidentally, of course, secretary and friend, but in no capacity was he expected in any way to interfere in the Princess' confinement. At first, indeed, he kept rigorously apart, but Charlotte's deep affection for him, as well as

Stockmar's anxiety increasing to consternation at Croft's ridiculous methods, eventually forced him to intervene. Naturally Sir Richard and Dr. Baillie must have strongly disliked the interference of the young foreign doctor into their sacred preserves, and it is highly improbable that Stockmar's more up-to-date theories were ever adopted for the Princess, but the suggestion sometimes made that the German doctor shunned all intervention during Charlotte's *grossesse* simply to avoid all responsibility in the event of the Princess' confinement being a failure, unfortunately cannot be summarily dismissed, as will later appear, although such behaviour could hardly seem in keeping with Stockmar's conscientious and interfering character. It is more than probable, however, that Stockmar's suggestions were scorned and certain that they were hotly resented by the two Englishmen.

On Monday, November 3rd, Princess Charlotte began her travail. Naturally there was great tension in the country, but no undue anxiety was felt. Was not their Princess hale and hearty, broad in the thighs, a typical English girl? Mrs. Griffiths, Charlotte's nurse was also sure of a safe delivery. She was also a particular favourite of the Princess. "How smart you are, Griffiths," Charlotte would say to please her as the old nurse came smiling into her room with her gruel.

Charlotte suffered much but bore it bravely. Doubtless Leopold suffered too, in the usual flurried, helpless way of husbands, and despite the vital importance of the child to his own position, Leopold, in his love, would assuredly have chosen Charlotte to live had there been a choice. Actually there was to be none.

On Wednesday, November 5th, at nine in the evening, Princess Charlotte was delivered of a son—born dead. The mother took her tragedy with superb philosophy and only thought of Leopold; his bitter disappointment, how she had failed him—those thoughts were uppermost in her mind. Naturally Leopold would be able to find many convincing arguments with which to console her. Were they not both still very young, she only twenty-two, he barely twenty-six? They had many years of mutual fruitfulness in front of them. The first child often dies;

perhaps next time they could have other doctors, more modern in their methods ; perhaps even Stockmar. . . .

At first no alarm was felt at Claremont for the childless mother. Then at midnight, when Mrs. Griffiths brought the gruel, Charlotte could not swallow it. Her head was singing and her body had become all cold. The English doctors were hastily summoned. Stockmar came too. Nervously they tried to warm her with hot water-bottles ; all in vain. Stockmar at once thought she was in danger and said so. Sir Richard was furious. "Are you or I in authority here ?" he demanded jealously. Stockmar, feeling further interference to be futile, decided to retire to bed. On the way he stopped at Leopold's room where Leopold was sleeping. Briefly and calmly he told him of his wife's condition. Leopold, worn out with worry, disappointment and lack of sleep, seems to have been unable to grasp the gravity of the situation, or perhaps Stockmar's quiet and detached words failed to penetrate into his sleep-riddled brain. Pathetically, almost unaccountably, Leopold fell back, asleep. Stockmar retired to his room.

Meanwhile Charlotte was in agony. "Oh ! what a pain," she was moaning, "it is all here pressing my stomach." Obviously the hot water-bottles were of no avail, so the English doctors decided to try port wine. Surely, they thought, a good vintage port will warm up Her Royal Highness nicely ? But Charlotte's stomach revolted at this barbarous treatment and her agonies increased. Sir Richard Croft and Dr. Baillie at last became seriously alarmed. They knew of no other palliatives and reluctantly, they sent for Stockmar. "Here comes an old friend of yours," announced Dr. Baillie as the German doctor hurriedly entered the room. Charlotte, twisted with pain, stretched out her hand eagerly to Stockmar. "Stocky, they have made me tipsy," she groaned. Stockmar knew at once that the end was at hand. Did he think of Leopold or did he feel that there was no time to fetch him ? Or was he too afflicted by the scene for action, so struck with horror by the murderous work of the English doctors ? Anyhow, Leopold was not summoned to the death-bed of his wife. . . . At two in the morning on November 6th, Princess Charlotte of Wales fell over onto

her face, her legs twisted up in agony. "Stocky, Stocky," she implored, and died.

As soon as Stockmar saw that the Princess was dead he realised his terrible duty and went to Leopold's room. The Prince was asleep and Stockmar told him he should get up and go to Charlotte. Leopold obeyed, but when he came to his wife's bed, he did not understand. The English doctors have left her, thought Leopold, how serene she lies. "Charlotte!" he called her twice by name. She did not answer. An icy fear gripped Leopold's heart. He rushed back and brought Stockmar in. Was it conceivable that God could have been so cruel? . . . Then Stockmar gently put him into a chair and, kneeling by his side, he told him the truth. . . . Incredulous, Leopold moved to the death-bed, then, having realised he was truly in the presence of Charlotte's corpse, convulsively, almost wildly, he kissed her pallid, frigid hands and bathed them with his tears. . . . Then he turned to Stockmar, his sole support in a world of shattered values; "I am now quite desolate," he pleaded, "promise always to stay with me." Stockmar promised, then gently took him from the room of death and put him back to bed. That whole night he spent by his side, at first quietly talking to Leopold, till weeping drowned his consciousness and misery in sleep.

The deep affection felt for Charlotte by all the servants at Claremont was shown by the universal grief displayed on the news of the terrible and unforeseen tragedy. Indeed, according to the *Observer* of November 9th, "numbers of females" were "troubled with hysterics and other fits."

The next day, moving with listless steps round Claremont, Leopold discovered Charlotte's hat and cloak on a screen in her sitting-room; she had left them there absentmindedly, on returning from the last walk before her travail. Then he saw her watch, still ticking gaily on the mantelpiece. Leopold ordered that none of these cherished objects should be touched or moved. There they were to lie for ever, sweet but bitter symbols of his sorrow.

The blinds were drawn at Claremont; inside, a deathly stillness, semi-darkness . . . outside, the falling leaves and

raw November winds. Leopold and Stockmar were alone. . . . But that utter sense of desolation, almost a solace to his numbed mind, was not to last. The serjeant-surgeon was the first to break it. He announced that he had been sent by the Regent to embalm the body of Princess Charlotte. Embalm his Charlotte? At first Leopold protested vigorously, but the serjeant-surgeon got his way and the Princess was embalmed.

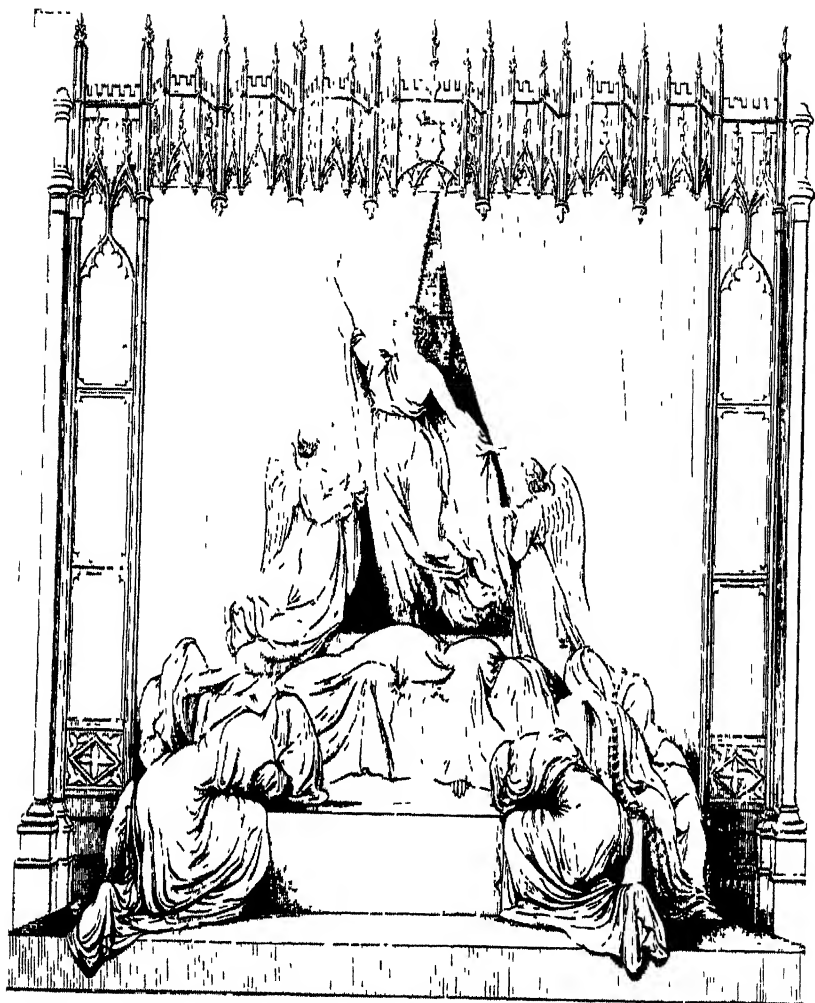
Then came the royal visits of condolence. Those of the Dukes of Kent and Gloucester were most welcome, of Sussex and Cambridge tolerable, of Cumberland decidedly unpleasant. But the visit of the Regent, on November 10th, was a brutal trial of endurance for Leopold; that luscious rolling figure, with its pendulous stomach encased in mourning weeds, those blubbering eyes, those royal self-pitying tears . . . but the Regent was not entirely insincere. He had been faintly proud of his handsome daughter, particularly when married and out of the way, and now he was convinced that he was deeply distressed. Drink and sexual indulgence produced in him the most pleasant reactions to paternal sorrow. His only daughter . . . the apple of his eye . . . how he had cherished and loved her . . . had Leopold not remarked his indulgent affection towards her? Nauseated, Leopold consoled him; duty as well as prudence demanded it, and at last the Regent swayed back to his carriage, sniffing and muttering, leaving Leopold alone with Stockmar, his embalmed Charlotte and his bitter regrets.

Over twenty years later, Leopold summed up his father-in-law's reactions on the death of Charlotte in a rather brutal letter to his niece Queen Victoria; ". . . of the Regent it was observed that for years he had not been in such good spirits than by the loss of his daughter." Presumably, the Regent's spirits were further brightened by the death of his wife four years later, for immediately after Caroline had died, he exclaimed to an astonished audience in Dublin: "This is one of the happiest moments of my life."

Nearly ten days were to elapse between the death of the Princess and her burial. Did Leopold, during that time, ever blame himself that Charlotte had not been better

attended during her confinement? Probably he did, but actually he had no cause for self-recrimination, for, no doubt, both Sir Richard Croft and Dr. Baillie were the ordinary Court physicians and Leopold, as a foreigner, was in no position to judge their capabilities nor secure more talented men, even if they had existed. But what were Stockmar's feelings as he surveyed the ruins of his master's hopes? "I have become cold and bitter, chiefly against myself," he wrote, "and . . . hunt down every wish of my heart, however innocent, as a ridiculous presumption." Why bitter against himself? Did he regret he had not been more insistent with the English doctors, more determined to break down their prejudice and ignorance in a last valiant effort to enforce his more enlightened methods on Dr. Baillie and Sir Richard Croft? The following, however, is Stockmar's official explanation of his feelings and actions during that trying time: "I can only thank God that I never allowed myself to be blinded by vanity . . . I knew the hidden rocks too well, and knew that the national pride and contempt for foreigners would accord no share of honour to me if the result were favourable and in an unfavourable issue would heap all the blame on me . . . these considerations induced me to explain to the Prince that, from the commencement of her pregnancy, I must decline all and any share in the treatment . . . when I recall all the circumstances, I feel but too vividly the greatness of the danger which I escaped. . . ." Certainly those are not the words of a courageous man and despite this disclaimer, Stockmar may have endured the pangs of an uneasy conscience. But, if Stockmar could regard himself in any way as partly responsible for Princess Charlotte's death, at any rate his sins were those of omission, the result of tactful and circumspect habits of mind. Throughout all Stockmar's long life, few errors of judgment could be recorded against him, and he can hardly be blamed for avoiding so great a risk at the beginning of his ambitious career.

Probably both Leopold and Stockmar must have realised that Sir Richard Croft, with his crude and primitive methods, was responsible for the blood-poisoning which caused Princess Charlotte's death, but if either cherished



The Tomb of Princess Charlotte in St. George's Chapel.

By Matthew Wyatt.

"If Charlotte had lived, Victoria would never have been born."

notions of revenge, which is highly unlikely, they would have been gratifyingly fulfilled in the following February of 1818. Sir Richard Croft was awaiting the delayed confinement of a clergyman's wife, in an acute nervous state. By chance, he found a loaded revolver and blew out his brains. Nevertheless, the wife of the parson was safely delivered of her child. Stockmar pronounced in a letter his funeral oration ; " Peace to thy ashes ! on which no guilt rests, save that thou wast not exceptionally wise or exceptionally strong."

The *Gentleman's Magazine* gives us some valuable information about Princess Charlotte's funeral arrangements and also about the ceremony itself. Her body, as we know, was first embalmed, much to Leopold's irritation, and " enclosed in a number of wrappers, after the manner of the Egyptians ; and was then enclosed in rich blue velvet, tied with white satin riband." She was placed in her coffin on November 15th. Every evening, at eleven o'clock, Leopold had visited the corpse, " to weep over her, previous to his retiring to bed." The remains of Charlotte and her child were moved in procession to Windsor at six o'clock on the evening of the 18th. Charlotte's coffin of mahogany was " covered with the richest crimson velvet, ornamented in the most splendid style ; the urn ornamented in a similar manner." The coffin of the infant was " covered with crimson velvet, the ornaments of silver, those of the Princess' coffin and urn, highly gilt." The sad procession reached Windsor at a quarter to one and the bodies were placed in the Lower Lodge. Then, at eight o'clock, Charlotte and her child were taken and buried in St. George's Chapel ; " the chief mourner was conducted to a chair at the head of the corpse." After the ceremony, " Prince Leopold was greatly agitated as he left the choir ; his pallid countenance and agonised step excited the greatest sympathy."

At Princess Charlotte's funeral, one of the bearers of her coffin, a yeoman of the Guard, found its weight unsupportable and died from the injuries inflicted on his spine. After that incident, a trolley covered with black velvet was always used in the place of human backs at royal funerals.

CHAPTER THREE

“My fate is bound up with that of England, and whatever befalls that green isle I shall not easily abandon it.”

LEOPOLD

LEOPOLD'S loss should not be measured solely by worldly values. There is no doubt that he was devoted to Princess Charlotte both with his mind as well as with his body. Her fresh and unspoilt outlook and her vivacious boisterous ways had captivated him as much as had her buxom and desirable body. Leopold in fact, had been seriously in love with Charlotte. His reactions, therefore, to her death were doubtless the same as those of any young man who loses the woman he loves ; a feeling of utter loneliness at first, mingled with some self-pity at the harsh and unjust treatment received at the hands of some unknown power ; then a perfectly natural return of normal desires. Many men, who have loved their first wives deeply, marry again with an apparently indecent haste, as a result of the combined influence of solitude and sex. Stockmar and political considerations prevented any instant escape into matrimony in the case of Leopold and, in consequence, he can hardly be blamed in his widowhood for satisfying his physical desires, in the manner, in which tradition asserts, he did.

The death of Princess Charlotte, however, had a far more important influence on Leopold's character than can be attributed to mere sexual inconvenience, or even to future political considerations. The disappointment and bitterness which her death produced in the innermost recesses of his heart, killed in Leopold, not only the desire, but even the capacity, to love again. The cold and formal manner with which he treated his second royal wife can be entirely explained by this enduring sense of loss and

aggravement which neither time nor circumstances could eradicate, and account to some extent, for Leopold's cynical and calculating outlook in later life. Indeed, with advancing age, it becomes increasingly difficult to find many lovable or human characteristics in the nature of the first King of the Belgians. But these lay buried in Charlotte's coffin in St. George's Chapel under Matthew Wyatt's dignified and emotional tomb and, at seventy-three, Leopold could truthfully assert that he had never known again the bliss of that one short year of married life.

After this sincere and abiding sorrow, came the calamitous change in Leopold's position and prospects, which were shattered by Charlotte's death. From being the husband of the future Queen of England, a burgeoning Prince Consort, Leopold became a lonely and romantic widower with little position, except that accorded him by universal sympathy, and few, if any, prospects of following a career of importance in this country. Certainly, to console him, the Regent gave Leopold the title of "Prince Royal," granted him authority to use the royal arms and made him a Field-Marshal and a Privy Councillor. He was also to retain his annual grant of £50,000 from Parliament and Claremont House was made over to him for life. These were, however, but meagre consolations for the power that had so unkindly slipped through his fingers and it is probable that the only morsel of comfort left to Leopold was the vague hope, entertained no doubt, by many others, that owing to the lack of an heir and the unpopularity of the Regent, the time might come when Leopold would be welcomed by the English people as a way out of their dynastic difficulties.

This hope, however, was a frail one after 1817, in view of the touching little ceremony which took place in the drawing-room of Kew Palace in June of the following year. There, in the presence of old Queen Charlotte, who died five months later, the Duke of Clarence, aged fifty-three, was married to Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen; and the Duke of Kent, aged fifty-one, was married to Leopold's favourite sister, Maria Louisa Victoria, of Saxe-Coburg,

the buxom widow of Prince Emich Charles of Leiningen. A month earlier, the Duke of Cambridge had married Augusta, the daughter of the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel. The first two Royal Dukes were certainly making heavy sentimental sacrifices on the altar of the dynastic succession, but the fruitfulness of their venture was proved in the following year, 1819, when, amongst other royal births, the Duchess of Kent was delivered of the Princess Victoria. This finally dashed any hopes Leopold may have entertained of being called upon to assume the English crown.

But the ceremony at Kew Palace, and its fertile results so vital to the Hanoverian dynasty, and solely caused by Princess Charlotte's death, not only destroyed Leopold's optimistic dreams, but also entirely changed the personnel of our Royal Family. Had Leopold been gifted with visionary powers to enable him to see England and indeed Europe, thirty years later, he would have been truly amazed at the far-reaching results occasioned by Charlotte's death. As regards himself, he would never have become the first King of the Belgians, nor have married a daughter of the King of the French, nor would his "dear niece," and life-long correspondent, Queen Victoria, ever have been born, for the Duke of Kent would never have abandoned his beloved Madame St. Laurent, except to produce an heir to the English throne. The Duke had been most frank in an indiscreet conversation with Creevey on that subject: "God only knows the sacrifice it will be whenever I shall think it my duty to become a married man. It is now seven and twenty years that Madame St. Laurent and I have lived together." It is also unlikely that the Duke of Cambridge would ever have espoused Augusta of Hesse-Cassel, who was the mother of the Duchess of Teck and, therefore, the grandmother of our present Queen. The present Royal Family would in fact never have existed, but for the death of Princess Charlotte. Then, again, the Duke of Clarence would never have become King William IV of England but King of Hanover in 1830 (Charlotte could naturally not have succeeded to Hanover any more than could Victoria) instead of the Duke of Cumberland succeeding to that throne in 1837. . . . The

“ifs” of history resulting from Charlotte’s death are fascinating, but it would be irrelevant to extend them further.

To return to Leopold ; after the bitter experience of Charlotte’s death, the barbaric splendour of the joint burial and the interminable royal and aristocratic condolences, Leopold’s natural inclination was to return for a short while, to Coburg. But Stockmar was adamant ; “Your Highness’ mourning belongs to England,” he is reported to have said ; “it is in England you must weep for your Princess for whom all England mourns . . . if you return to Coburg your position in this country will be for ever destroyed.” What position did Stockmar visualise ? Undoubtedly he regarded England as a convenient spring-board for Leopold to dive into the inviting ocean of European politics. Leopold was now a Royal Highness, a prominent member of the English Royal Family ; besides there was that £50,000 a year ; but what Parliament had given, Parliament could as easily take away. It would be the grossest folly, Stockmar urged, for Leopold to immerse himself for too long a time in the torpid waters of Coburg ; and Stockmar was right.

So, for a while, Leopold remained at Claremont, where a little temple built by Charlotte in the garden, was converted by the hand of her widower into a Mausoleum. Under the vault was placed a bust of the Princess. This action, so typical of the spirit of the romantic age, was reflected in many of the poetical effusions written on Princess Charlotte’s death, of which, perhaps, the most distressing was Mr. W. C. Harvey’s poem, entitled, “The Grave of Hope, an Elegy upon the Princess Charlotte.” In it appeared these lines :

“ I feel a sigh ; much like to end in groaning ;
I wish to write ; yet nothing else but moaning.”

Moncrieff, however, produced some rather charming lines, including the following :

“ The favor’d lover of a summer’s day,
A season’s bridegroom, Husbander of tears,
Sire of a moment, Widower of years.”

Leopold may also have felt gratified by the fact that at the Haverfordwest Assembly Ball, held early in January, of which Lord Milford was Steward, the rooms, according to *The Times*, displayed "Sable hangings of crape, black wax lights ornamented with cypress leaves, and three transparent urns, with the name of the lamented Princess Charlotte inscribed on them." Although *The Times* referred to this party as a "Black Ball," it adds that, "the Company was unusually numerous, and notwithstanding the gloom of the decoration, danced on the light fantastic toe."

For the next ten years, that is, until 1827, there appears to have been no continuity of living, nor indeed of purpose, in Leopold's life. His main interest during those years undoubtedly lay in his sister, the Duchess of Kent, and her infant daughter, Princess Victoria. But before considering the charming and important relationship which originated in the 'twenties, between the future Queen of England and her Uncle Leopold, mention must be made of Leopold's somewhat obscure activities during those years.

"Who would dare to make plans in this inconstant world?" murmured Leopold about 1820, and certainly his own seem to have been most haphazard at this time, although it would be a mistake to imagine that Leopold was simply wasting all his opportunities during this period. Stockmar was always in the offing to prevent that.

Leopold's first visit abroad, after the death of Princess Charlotte, was probably to the Pyrenees in March, 1818, on which occasion an unknown poet celebrated the event with a poem entitled, "The Recluse of the Pyrenees." Possibly the author was an optimist; anyhow in September of the same year, Leopold left England again for an unknown destination, when in the most enlightened fashion he opened Claremont to the public, five days in the week. In April, 1819, Leopold bought a house in Vienna for £70,000, it was said on behalf of his unsatisfactory brother Duke Ernest, who frequently demanded a change from Coburg and from his long-suffering wife Louise, but in May, Leopold was certainly again in England, attending

the accouchement of the Duchess of Kent. In October Leopold was at Oxford, where he was made a Doctor of Civil Law, staying with Lord Harcourt at Nuneham for the occasion. In February, 1820, he attended the funeral of George III, at which over-due function, according to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, "There was a settled melancholy in the countenance of Prince Leopold, which naturally heightened the interest which His Royal Highness' presence uniformly inspires."

In the same year that "Farmer George" died, Leopold had a distressing passage with the Regent now King George IV. Although Leopold was extremely anxious to keep in with his father-in-law for dynastic and political reasons, he had been, not unnaturally, embittered by the Regent's callous action in handing over to his mistress Lady Conyngham a quantity of Princess Charlotte's jewellery. Amongst this was a magnificent sapphire which, originally belonging to the Stuarts, had been given by the Cardinal Duke of York to King George III.

This solecism probably fortified Leopold in his determination to visit his mother-in-law, the now, *de jure*, though not *de facto*, Queen Caroline; so towards the end of the year Leopold drove down to Brandenbourg House, while the Queen's trial was still in progress in the House of Lords, but after the evidence against Her Majesty had been closed. "She looked very strange and said strange things," Leopold recounted later, without, unfortunately, specifying Caroline's aberrations, but anyhow she received him kindly and was no doubt flattered to be visited by her handsome son-in-law, at a time when she was in such dire need of sympathy and support. The King was, however, furious at what he considered to have been a gross indiscretion on Leopold's part, and at a levee shortly afterwards totally ignored his presence. Undeterred by this slight, Leopold approached the Duke of York and tartly remarked: "The King has thought proper to take his line and I shall take mine." He then left the room. But the King's curiosity soon got the better of his chagrin, and shortly after the levee he sent for Leopold, gossiped freely about his ill-treated Queen, and enquired most particularly exactly what she had been wearing when

Leopold made his visit to Brandenburg House. Doubtless the scandal of Queen Caroline's trial deeply affected Leopold, who always entertained some affection for his imprudent mother-in-law, and he must have certainly felt that, had Charlotte been alive at the time to strengthen his position, their joint mediation might have prevented the trial from ever taking place. During this same year there appeared in the Press a brief but melancholy obituary notice which may have caused Leopold some pain: "Suddenly, in an apoplectic fit, while finishing a portrait of Prince Leopold; Mr. Percy, the artist, well-known for his exquisite models in miniature size."

In July of the following year, 1821, Leopold attended the magnificent ceremony of King George IV's coronation, arrayed in the inspiring robes of a Knight of the Garter. Beautiful as Leopold appears in contemporary prints, at this the last full-dress coronation in England, his pleasure must naturally have been marred by the reflection that had his wife been alive he would have attended as the husband of the Princess of Wales.

In 1821 Leopold took up conchology. Shells, however, did not become Leopold's exclusive interest, for in the early '20's he embarked on the first of the two liaisons, which caused considerable comment in London at the time. This was an affair with a Viennese lady called Countess Ficquelmont, whose husband later became Austrian Ambassador in St. Petersburg. But this connection Leopold soon terminated, for the Countess, although gay and charming, either overestimated her lover's income or else his willingness to spend it on herself. The second object of his desires was the famous Jane, Lady Ellenborough, who, the daughter of Admiral Digby, had been married at the age of fifteen to a prominent Tory peer. It is curious that Leopold, who was always so discreet in his amours, should have selected on this occasion one of the most talked-of ladies in London. Indeed, after his mother-in-law, Caroline, Princess of Wales, whom she much resembled in her imprudent and headstrong behaviour, no woman at that moment was the object of more vulgar interest or general surprise.

However, it is related that one night at a ball, Jane

approached Leopold, and pulling from the bouquet on her bosom two rose-buds, she kissed them and handed them to the Prince. Unable to withstand this brazen gesture, Leopold succumbed to the charms of this notorious lady with the childlike smile ; she was, in every way, totally unsuitable to be the mistress of such a serious-minded and cautious man. Indeed, their tender friendship was eventually broken by Leopold's insistence that she should renounce her London life and dedicate herself entirely to him. The further existence of this distinguished flirt and beauty deserved to be closely followed by Leopold.

On abandoning her royal lover, Lady Ellenborough at once threw herself into the arms of Prince Felix Schwarzenberg, at that time an attaché at the Austrian Embassy in London, but who, in the graver role of Imperial Chancellor, will often reappear in these pages. Unfortunately, the Prince, who was then suffering from the prevailing fashion of "Weltschmerz," and in consequence frequently demanded solitude rather than society, abandoned his mistress after two years' connection, and being now divorced from her long-suffering husband and in reduced circumstances, Jane consented to marry a respectable German baron. This experiment was naturally a failure, the Baron was left lamenting, with a son on his hands, and Jane became the mistress successively of Ludwig I of Bavaria and of his son King Otto of Greece. Then, after a few hectic years spent with a beautiful young Hellene, Jane retired to Syria, where her ageing charms were enjoyed by a minor sheik. Fortunately for posterity, the beauty of Jane, Lady Ellenborough, who died in 1881, can still be appreciated in the "Schönheitsgalerie" in Munich, where hangs her portrait, painted by Carl Stieler at the command of King Ludwig of Bavaria.

While Leopold fancied he was in love in London, Stockmar had not been idle in Coburg ; far from engaging in amorous intrigues, he had managed to get himself married in 1822 to a wealthy lady called Fanny Sommer, who, on the death of her parents, was expected to inherit a hundred thousand thalers, equivalent approximately to twenty thousand pounds. Frau Fanny, who was the only daughter of a rich apothecary, was neither

pretty nor amiable, but both the meanness and asperity inherent in her character were considerably increased by the callous treatment of her husband. Stockmar had married this unattractive lady purely for the sake of her money, which enabled him to be financially independent of Leopold ; a situation which he realised would greatly enhance his position with his parsimonious friend. In return, he rarely visited his wife more than once a year, in Coburg during the summer, and although he provided her with children and occasionally returned with a gift of jewellery, bought with her money abroad, she was never once allowed to accompany him on his long and frequent visits to Brussels or London. Frau Fanny remained a complete but convenient nonentity in Stockmar's life, until at its close, forty years after his marriage, the Baron paid the penalty in full for injuring a woman's pride.

To return to Leopold and his more orthodox pursuits ; the year 1822 he felt entitled to spend abroad and divided his time between Coburg and his elegant mansion in Vienna. In 1823 Claremont and Ramsgate shared his patronage. Coburg claimed him for the whole of the following year, while he lived in England in complete obscurity in 1825, probably the time of his liaison with Lady Ellenborough, except that he attended in London the opening of the Royal College of Physicians. The last two years of this period of apparently aimless wandering were mainly spent at Coburg and Naples, but by the spring of 1827, Leopold was back at Claremont, and the next three years were divided between Grecian politics and a semi-serious affair of the heart. Before, however, referring to these events, some account must be given of the early and charming relationship between Leopold and his niece Princess Victoria. ♀

The Duke of Kent, as has been said, was married at Kew Palace in June, 1818, to Maria Louisa Victoria of Saxe-Coburg, widow of Prince Emich Charles of Leiningen and sister to Prince Leopold. Twenty years younger than her second husband, the Duchess of Kent was an unintelligent but by no means unattractive woman, and although the Duke had been most reluctantly parted from Madame St. Laurent and his illegitimate children, he

probably felt that he had been comparatively fortunate in the lady selected to be his second wife. At any rate, both had the benefit of previous conjugal experience. However, money was scarce and shortly after the ceremony at Kew, the Duke retired to his humble home at Amorbach in Bavaria, there to enjoy his royal bride.

The ensuing year after the triple marriage witnessed a race in royal child-bearing. The three Duchesses concerned, Clarence, Kent and Cambridge, presumably realised that they had been married solely to secure the continuity of the Hanoverian family on the throne of England, a somewhat unromantic background for matrimony, and they deserved to enjoy the anxious attentions of their obese and ageing husbands.

Which Duchess conceived first, is unfortunately unknown, but in March, 1819, the Duchess of Cambridge produced a son in Hanover; highly satisfactory but somewhat inconclusive, as she was the wife of the youngest Duke in the race. The Duchess of Clarence had given birth to a daughter the day before, also in Hanover, but the child only survived a few hours. Then, at Kensington Palace, on May 24th, the Duchess of Kent gave birth to the Princess Victoria, who after the death of the Duchess of Clarence's second baby daughter in 1820 was regarded as practically certain to succeed to the throne of England. It is, however, interesting to remember that, for two months, from March to May, 1819, the Duke of Cambridge's son, who was our present Queen Mary's grandfather, was in the direct succession to the throne.

On the three Duchesses, whose fruitfulness was of such importance to the nation, only one, the Duchess of Kent, gave birth to her child in England. This achievement, which certainly proved of such happy augury to the child, was not accomplished without inconvenience and expense, but the Duke of Kent was so convinced that he himself would one day soon succeed to the throne, being the most virile and healthy of the royal brothers, that nothing would induce him to allow his Duchess to be confined at Amorbach. So the long dreary journey was made to England and there on May 24th at Kensington Palace the future Queen Victoria was born.

Financial difficulties were astonishingly recurrent with all George III's sons and, hardly were the Kents settled in London than it became obvious that their impoverished condition would neither permit them to continue to live in Kensington Palace, nor, indeed, even to return to their house at Amorbach. Fortunately, however, for the Duchess, she possessed in Leopold a rich and generous brother, who, on hearing of their alarming position, instantly offered to pay the expenses of their journey back to Amorbach (a solution much favoured by the Regent, who was always glad to be rid of his penurious relatives), or else to allow his sister £3000 a year to enable them to live in Kensington Palace. The latter offer was accepted by the Kents with little hesitation.

On January 23rd, 1820, when Princess Victoria was just eight months old, the Duke of Kent died from a chill contracted at Sidmouth; a most unexpected event, as the Duke had been in the most excellent health and spirits. Twenty years after, Leopold described to his niece, then Queen Victoria, the discomforts he had to endure on that occasion on her behalf: "I was shooting . . . in Berkshire when I received . . . the horrifying news of your poor father's deadly illness. I hastened in bitter cold weather to Sidmouth. . . . That dreary journey in bitter cold and damp weather I shall not easily forget. I looked very sharp after the poor little baby, then about eight months old. Arrived in London we were very unkindly treated by George IV, whose great wish was to get you and your Mamma out of the country, and I must say, without my assistance you could not have remained."

◀In consequence of the Duke of Kent's death, Leopold's position as regards his sister's welfare, suddenly changed from that of a benevolent brother to the responsible protector of the mother of the probable future Queen of England. In fact, he not only assumed the natural role of his sister's guardian, but in future was compelled to combine with his part of uncle to the Princess, the arduous position of father as well. Apart from his natural and commendable desire to safeguard his sister's future, particularly after the death of the Duke of Kent and of the Duchess of Clarence's second baby, Leopold would not be slow to realise his

own enhanced position and opportunities as the uncle of Princess Victoria, who, now in due course, was almost certain to become Queen.)

(The personal relations between Leopold and his niece during the 'twenties must naturally be partly conjectural, but no doubt Leopold showed himself to be an indulgent and affectionate uncle.) We know, also from Princess Victoria herself, that he lost no opportunity of improving her mind. At an early age the child Victoria wrote in her diary: "To hear dear Uncle Leopold speak on any subject, is like reading a highly instructive book." When he was absent the Princess was an admirable correspondent. In 1828 Leopold was in Italy and Victoria wrote to him in November of that year: "I use every day your pretty soup-basin. Is it very warm in Italy?" The letter ended in a firmer key: "I am very angry with you, Uncle, for you have never written to me once since you went. . . ." No doubt on his return, Leopold would be armed with instructive presents from abroad.

The charming domestic scene at Claremont, which Leopold placed at his sister's disposal immediately on the death of the Duke of Kent, was suddenly interrupted in 1830 by a matter of immense personal consequence to Leopold and indeed, of considerable significance to Europe in general. Leopold was offered the throne of Greece.

Previous, however, to this definite offer of a crown, the Mexicans, in the full flush of their successful rebellion against Spain, hinted to Leopold that they might find him an acceptable ruler. Probably they hoped that an "English" Prince would afford them protection against the Spaniards. But Leopold declined to be drawn, wisely regarding the proposal as too perilous for acceptance. Thirty years later Leopold gave another reason for this refusal to his son-in-law, the Archduke Maximilian, then about to start for the new world as first and last European Emperor of Mexico: "England thought it would be too selfish of me to accept," he explained with his customary vanity, "and that it would be too dangerous for Victoria if I went so far away." Mexico, however, was never a serious preoccupation for Leopold, but he much desired the crown of Greece,

The tortuous course of Grecian independence belongs to the history of Europe, and Leopold eventually proved a small and inconsequential fly in that cloying levantine ointment. But in so far as his life and character were affected by these abortive negotiations, they are of importance to the study of Leopold's career.

It was in 1825 that the possibility of becoming King of Greece first crossed Leopold's horizon. He was then unofficially approached by various representatives of the Greeks, who were still struggling to free themselves from the Turkish Empire. Leopold was naturally delighted at the prospect and the English Government at first encouraged him in the complicated negotiations. Statesmen of all parties in this country had long fully realised Leopold's powers and capabilities and ever since the death of Princess Charlotte, had been anxious that they should not be wasted. Although by training and experience Leopold had an international outlook, he was nevertheless by this time thoroughly anglicised, and the English Government felt that his abilities should be turned to Great Britain's advantage. Obviously, it would be to the profit of England to have a Prince, who owed much to this country and would therefore be strongly pro-English in his sympathies, as the first King and independent ruler of Greece.

The negotiations of 1825, however, were abruptly closed by the influence of Canning, then Foreign Secretary, over Leopold, who maintained that the Prince in the near future might be of more use in England than on a distant throne in Greece. Canning's exact reasons for this attitude have never been known, but the health, both of the Duke of York (who died in 1827) and of the Duke of Clarence, together with King George IV's infirmities, which did not excite expectations of a prolonged reign, pointed to the possibility, that at any time, Princess Victoria might be expected to become Queen. In that case, a Regent would naturally be required, as the Princess was only eight. Of course, there was her mother; but the Duchess of Kent was hardly suitable for such an exalted post. It is highly probable that Canning had his eye on Leopold, should a Regent be necessary during the first part of Victoria's

reign, and therefore he opposed his departure from this country. Anyhow, Leopold turned down the first Greek offer of 1825.

On October 20th, 1827, was fought the fortuitous battle of Navarino, when an impudent shell of a wayward Turkish Commander was the cause of the complete destruction of the Ottoman Navy by the Allied Fleet, under the command of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington, thus opening the way to the complete independence of Greece. The year 1827 also witnessed the unexpected death of Canning. England, Russia and France had now openly espoused the side of the insurgent Greeks, to the inevitable fury of Metternich, and the cause of Grecian Independence, which two years before had been sustained by the arms of the Greeks alone, was now supported by a majority of the Great Powers.

From 1827 to 1830, Greece languished under the unsatisfactory presidency of Count Capodistria, former head of the Chancellery of Tsar Alexander I. On February 3rd of the latter year, however, the independence of Greece was declared in a protocol, and the President himself, under pressure from the Powers, offered the throne of Greece to Prince Leopold. Although Capodistria naturally disliked having to give place to a monarch, he preferred Leopold to any other candidate, as he had met and appreciated his excellent qualities many years before, when they both were serving Russia.

No sooner had Leopold received this second offer of the Kingdom of Greece, than, without any preliminary investigations as to what general support he would obtain, he hastened to accept the throne. This precipitate action was one of the few grave political errors that Leopold made in a long and successful international career, and as he was nearly forty at the time, his mistake cannot be attributed to youth or to inexperience. The truth was that Leopold's innate prudence melted in the sun of flattery. It is difficult to blame him; the bitter disappointment of Charlotte's death, depriving him of a future position of power which few European Princes would not have envied, followed by more than ten years of painful oblivion, forced him to regard the offer of a

crown as a heaven-sent opportunity, extremely flattering to his abilities, the acceptance of which could brook no delay.

But hardly had Leopold accepted the crown of Greece than his difficulties began. Although supported by Wellington, his action incensed King George IV. His Majesty had never been over partial to his slightly censorious son-in-law and, being at the time considerably under the influence of his brother the Duke of Cumberland, he strongly urged the candidature of Cumberland's brother-in-law, Duke Charles of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. Then Count Capodistria began to make obstruction. He wrote to Leopold, pointing out the passionate desire of the Greek nation for Crete, Samos and the Ionian Islands, and hinted that, should Leopold arrive in Greece without having previously obtained the concession of these islands from the Great Powers, his welcome in Athens would be far from encouraging. The suggestion, however, that Crete and the Ionian Islands should be given to Greece, met with the most stubborn resistance from the English Government, which considered that if Turkey were to be evicted from these islands, England should naturally step into her shoes. So, not without reason, Leopold began to have his first doubts about the wisdom of his initial blind acceptance of the throne of Greece. But apparently he was still hopeful of ultimate success, for in April, 1830, he did not relax his efforts to raise a loan for Greece in Paris, and gave a large order to a contractor for a supply of blue and white striped silk tents, under which he might repose in the balmy Grecian air.

In the same month another difficulty arose. George IV became seriously ill and hopes of an eventual Regency on behalf of his niece Victoria, instantly recurred to Leopold's mind. At the same time his sister the Duchess of Kent became genuinely alarmed at the prospect of her brother being parted from her, should her daughter succeed to the throne. The possibility of becoming Regent of England, undoubtedly in the end decided Leopold to decline the crown of Greece, despite his first acceptance, although his refusal was probably reluctant. The difficulties made by Capodistria, as well as the belief that in his new position

he would be used as a tool of Tory policy in the East (it was well known that at the time Leopold's politics far more coincided with the opinions of the extreme Whig leaders, Brougham and Durham) were in later years, the reasons given by Leopold for refusing the throne of Greece. But a letter he wrote as King of the Belgians, many decades later, proves that it was the optimistic belief that he might be called upon to assume control in England, which was the major cause of his final rejection of the Hellenes in May, 1830. "Had I taken the reins in England in 1830," he wrote, "much would not have happened in England, and what was bound to happen, would have been guided with more discretion." Leopold never underrated his capabilities. Hard words were said in foreign parts about Leopold and his sterile negotiations with the Greeks, and the Russian Ambassador in London, Prince Lieven, in a despatch to his Government charged Leopold with "*mauvaise foi, le cachet d'une intention coupable.*" But why Leopold's supposed intention of becoming Regent in England, after he had been married to her future Queen, should have been culpable, His Excellency did not explain.

That even after he had finally finished with her, Leopold retained a sentimental affection for Greece is certain. To become King and pacify that turbulent people would have been a work after his own heart, and in November, 1830, he wrote to the Archduke John of Austria that it had been his wish, "to do good in a country where there would have to be a good deal of reconstruction before it could be anything like what it was even in the Middle Ages." But the work of reconstruction was to be left in the hands of a Wittelsbach and not of a Wettin, and years later, when King Otto was drooping under the burden of his Hellenic Crown, Leopold, from the firm security of his Belgium throne, sadly exclaimed: "I have always felt home-sick for Greece."

CHAPTER FOUR

“As long as I live I will serve as a buckler to Belgium.”

LEOPOLD

POLITICS and “silly liaisons,” as Stockmar called them, were not Leopold’s only interest during the ’twenties. He was, in fact, approached from two different quarters with the object of ending his lonely widowhood. Soon after Charlotte’s death, Lady Augusta Murray, the first wife of the Duke of Sussex, made a determined effort to marry her daughter to Leopold. This creature was hopefully called by her friends, “the Princess Emma,” and according to contemporary reports, was a big, bouncing girl. Nevertheless, Leopold declined the proposed alliance. Then, in 1828, the French Legitimists were most anxious that Leopold should marry the widowed Duchess of Berri, whose husband had been assassinated in 1821; but despite the strong position of the French Royal House at that moment, Leopold had little in common with its old-fashioned political fancies, and politely escaped from that dazzling entanglement. But, in the same year that Leopold spurned the French alliance, he embarked on a complicated love-affair, despite the allurements of Greece.

He was in Berlin, on a visit to King Frederick William III, and one evening he was present in the private theatre in the Neues Palais at Potsdam, and witnessed a command performance of a popular musical-comedy called *Die Hottentottin*. More interesting to the Prince than the piece, however, was the attractive young person who played the role of the Hottentot, wearing a short frock, a tiger’s skin, coral ornaments and a head-dress of variegated feathers. On enquiry, he was informed that this charming actress was called Caroline Bauer and was a first cousin

of his dear friend, Baron Stockmar. Thus furnished with an admirable excuse to pay his compliments to Caroline, who lived with her mother Frau Bauer, he sent round his valet Hühnlein to their house in the Mohrenstrasse to inform the delighted ladies that Prince Leopold proposed to visit them the following day.

Frau Bauer, who was born a Stockmar and was an aunt of the Baron, had married an officer in the Baden Dragoons, who had died when Caroline was a child. Her early wish to go on the stage, had, under the circumstances, been sternly repressed, but eventually Caroline's ambition had been realised with the assistance of "Cousin Christian" who, however, had made the condition that for the sake of her family and of her art, she was always to wear new gloves and shoes at each performance. This impossible and ridiculous proviso Caroline had pretended to accept, and she had made a most successful career on the Berlin stage, according to her own account, being much admired by the Prussian King. Anyhow, at the time of Leopold's visit, she had just returned from a profitable season at St. Petersburg, where she had been accompanied as usual by her prudent and devoted mother.

Leopold arrived at the Bauer's house for this fateful interview in a hired conveyance, cautiously not wishing to use one of the royal carriages for a visit of this nature. But all caution was thrown to the winds when he found himself alone with his pretty actress, since, not only did he insist that she and her mother should make an immediate visit to Coburg, but he also made a confused offer of marriage to the startled Caroline. The reason for his dramatic and rash behaviour, Leopold later disclosed; he had seen in Caroline Bauer the living image of Princess Charlotte, and this remarkable discovery, for a time, completely destroyed his innate discretion and self-control. There is indeed much pathos in the picture of this lonely and disappointed man, who for ten years had been roaming Europe, trying to forget the past, with the assistance of women and politics, suddenly rediscovering by chance in a little Potsdam actress the physical likeness of his dead and adored wife.

Naturally, Frau Bauer and Caroline obeyed Leopold's

summons to meet him in Coburg, and here it was arranged that, in the following year, after the Prince's sojourn in Italy, mother and daughter should visit him in London, where they would be married, and later take up their residence in a house in Regent's Park.

Caroline in her *Memoirs* gives a delightful description of how, during this trip to Coburg, she attended a village fair on the lawn at Rosenau, the country residence of the Duke. All classes appear to have been present and pleasantly mixed, and while Caroline was dancing a "Ländler" (slow waltz) with a smart young farmer, to the accompaniment of a brass band, the Royal Family, consisting of the disreputable Duke, his two sons, Ernest and Albert, and his brother Leopold, made a gracious appearance on the terrace. Caroline was much gratified that her Prince searched for her diligently in the throng with his glass, and later made a rendezvous with her for the next day at Fulbach, a pretty country house in the neighbourhood of Coburg. There, mutual vows of fidelity were exchanged, probably at the moment sincere on both sides, over "a very respectable *dejeuner à la fourchette*, sweet golden Bordeaux and splendidly cooled Champagne. . . ." Everything was conducted with the utmost propriety. "Mama" and "Cousin Christian" were also present.

It is interesting to speculate how far the wary Stockmar agreed with the arrangement that Caroline and her mother should settle in London, and it is indeed curious that he should have tolerated Leopold putting himself into such a compromising position when, at any moment, his master might have become King of Greece. On the other hand, Stockmar may have perceived the strength of Leopold's temporary passion, thought it wise to regulate its course in the seclusion of Regent's Park, and realised at the same time that, should Leopold insist on contracting a morganatic marriage with Caroline, the difficulties of dissolving it would not be insuperable.

Caroline approached London with complete confidence in Leopold, a confidence, which she later asserted, had been by no means shared by her mother. On the drive up from Dover, she was ecstatic about the English countryside and, on reaching London, she was thrilled to observe

portraits of her Prince in scarlet uniform, alternating with those of Princess Charlotte, hanging over many shop-windows. These had been erected as an inducement to customers at the time of the Royal Wedding, and with the casual conservatism of the English people, had been allowed to remain in position, although the Princess had been dead twelve years.

But a bitter disappointment awaited the Bauers in Regent's Park. Caroline, in her steel-grey travelling-dress, with coral necklace and bracelets, and Frau Bauer, perhaps a small edition of the Duchess of Kent, her head a mass of swaying and confiding ostrich feathers, found to their annoyance and confusion that neither Leopold nor Stockmar was present to greet them on their arrival. Tea, however, was provided for them by a fussy German domestic and afterwards, they made a tour of inspection round their new home. It was like most of the houses in Regent's Park, of recent construction, and could even boast of a bathroom, lined with blue and white tiles. Nearby was Caroline's bedroom, decorated in white and green, and downstairs, besides her own boudoir with pink silk walls and curtains, were the large garden-saloon and an elegant dining-room furnished in polished light oak. A billiard-room was also provided, which, from its brown and gold leather hangings, suggested to the scandalised Frau Bauer that it might sometimes serve as a smoking-room as well.

When the Prince eventually appeared, the following morning, his first remark, on seeing Caroline, not only showed his dislike of a sun-tanned complexion, but also seemed to infer a distinct lack of interest in his former love. "Oh! how the spring sun has burnt you on the journey!" was Leopold's critical reply to Caroline's delighted greeting. Perhaps Leopold's Grecian pre-occupations can be partly blamed for his apparent coldness towards Caroline, but for several months after her arrival in England, his passions remained unstirred.

But although love was dormant, Leopold did not fail in politeness towards Caroline Bauer. Daily he visited her in Regent's Park, untalkative and absent-minded, and he never arrived without the unsympathetic company of his "Drizzling Box." This instrument contained a

device which converted gold and silver tassels or epaulets into their original powder. Leopold, with his slender fingers, would operate the box for hours on end. Its small burring noise was the only sound which disturbed the long and tedious silence, except an occasional yawn from Fräulein Bauer. Leopold's explanation that the "Drizzling Box" had been immensely popular at the Court of Queen Marie Antoinette and had been brought to England by the French refugees, did little to popularise it with Caroline, while Frau Bauer, who naturally regarded it as essential to be present herself at these lengthy and unstimulating interviews between the supposed lovers, sometimes found the "Burr" of Leopold's instrument so intolerable that, calling loudly for her smelling-salts, she would rush into the garden for air. Sometimes, to vary the monotony, Caroline would read aloud to her languid lover, and occasionally the latter would divert her with a German or Italian song.

Leopold's amorous outlook during this inactive period is hard to comprehend. Had he had no further use for Caroline, he would probably have dismissed her, particularly as political hopes, optimistic at that time, might have made Caroline, at any moment, more of a burden than an asset. But possibly Leopold found in this phantom of his lost Charlotte an oasis of mental repose and perhaps, being a man, he was too selfish to speculate on her inevitable reactions to his thoughtless behaviour. Indeed, Caroline's situation must have been well-nigh unbearable—an accepted mistress with the promise of becoming a wife, and the advantages of neither position.

Stockmar, however, was not the type of man to allow such an anomalous situation to last. He carefully sifted all Caroline's correspondence and, one day in the summer, he informed Leopold that King Frederick William of Prussia had heard rumours of his spineless conduct and insisted on knowing whether Caroline was Leopold's mistress or not. Whether His Majesty's interfering conduct was due to a bias in favour of Fräulein Bauer, or purely the result of his moral susceptibilities, is unknown, but the King's gesture was backed up by Stockmar who, it is presumed, told Leopold that, unless he instantly made up

his mind about Caroline, he would take his cousins back to Germany. Thus galvanised into action, Leopold decided to make Caroline his wife.

The marriage between Leopold and Caroline, which took place on July 2nd, 1829, in the saloon of the Bauers' house in Regent's Park, was a curious and cheerless ceremony. No clergyman was present and, although there was a marriage contract signed by Stockmar and his brother Charles, it is more than possible that this document possessed little legal value. In this contract Caroline was given the title of Countess Montgomery and a modest annual allowance was settled on her for life.

The reasons for Leopold's hasty and unnecessary action in marrying Caroline, outside Stockmar's surmised insistence, remain obscure. It is extremely unlikely that Caroline had either the character or the desire to copy Anne Boleyn's judicious move of withholding her charms, until her position was legalised, and probably she must have realised the ease with which Leopold could later escape from a morganatic marriage. That Stockmar should have given his consent to such a foolish scheme is amazing while, if Leopold married Caroline purely for his own convenience, fully determined to discard her when it suited him, his behaviour can only be described as brutally callous. It is possible, however, that the agitation set on foot by the King of Prussia, suddenly made Leopold realise how inhumane had been his treatment of Caroline and probably he hoped, by giving her the apparent security of matrimony, to make some amends for his past indifference. But it is to be feared that Leopold must have consoled himself with the reflection that, if at any time the bond should prove inconvenient, it would not be unfeasible to break it.

Once married, however, Leopold's feeling towards Caroline completely changed. Instead of a bored and unsatisfactory lover, he became an enthusiastic and presumably highly satisfactory spouse. For perhaps a month, Leopold and Caroline appear to have been radiantly happy together. But not for long was poor Caroline to enjoy the sweets of matrimony. At the end of July, Leopold departed for Carlsbad for a cure, and

it was arranged that Caroline and her mother should go to Paris, where the Prince would join them later. This plan was carried out but, on his arrival in Paris, poor Caroline at once discovered that Leopold's love had again mysteriously melted away. Perhaps it was that the waters of Carlsbad had cured Leopold of his passion for Caroline, as well as banished his rheumatic pains, or perhaps his hopes of a Grecian throne seemed brighter on his return to Court circles and, in consequence, hismorganatic wife an increased liability—anyhow, Leopold became once more immersed in politics and "drizzling." Poor Caroline was again on the shelf, as far as love was concerned.

Nevertheless, Leopold was not yet prepared to be separated permanently from Caroline, and insisted that after Christmas she and Frau Bauer should return to England. Reluctantly they obeyed and there he lodged them in a drab little house in Claremont Park, the big house being usually occupied by the Duchess of Kent and Princess Victoria. Poor Caroline was by now thoroughly disheartened by the callous and erratic treatment she had received from her "husband" and both she and her mother longed to be released and to return to Germany.

This was, no doubt, the unhappiest period of her connection with Leopold, and Caroline asserts in her Memoirs that her neglected and piteous state once so excited the sympathy of Stockmar, that he attempted to console her in a most uncousinly manner: upon which, according to Caroline, the Baron was shown the door. Two other incidents during her stay at Claremont are of some romantic interest. One day when, owing to the absence of the Duchess of Kent, Caroline was permitted to wander through the apartments once occupied by Princess Charlotte, she chanced to find an old grey parrot, covered with dirt and vermin, sitting on a pole in the ante-room. From what Leopold had told her, she at once realised that this was "Coco", Charlotte's pet parrot, and the Prince was only too pleased that Caroline should take the bird off his hands. Shocked by Leopold's unsentimental attitude towards "Coco," Caroline nursed him back to life and soon had the consolation of hearing him say: "Mutter Lina, ich liebe Dich." "Coco," who

accompanied Caroline on all her later theatrical tours, died, to her deep regret, in Dresden, in 1842. He had been the unconscious means of providing a subtle bond between Charlotte and Caroline.

During another visit to the big house at Claremont, Caroline saw a portrait of Princess Charlotte dressed in a blue and silver Russian costume ; it had been a present to Leopold from the Grand Duchess Catharine of Russia. The coincidence that Caroline herself possessed an almost identical costume, coupled with her own striking likeness to the dead Princess, the primary cause of Leopold's first infatuation, decided her to make one last and supreme effort to rekindle his early love. So one day, on arriving at the villa to "drizzle," Leopold found Caroline standing before him in her Russian dress ; it might have been the ghost of his Charlotte. Surprise, the Prince registered, but otherwise Caroline's ruse was a complete failure, for her "husband" contented himself with comparing in details the physical peculiarities of his two "wives." Princess Charlotte, he informed her, had a more finely cut nose, but not so pretty a mouth as "Mizi," his nickname for Caroline. Charlotte was fuller in form, "Mizi" the more graceful. The fair hair and fresh complexion, he added, were common to both. Crushed by this indifference and pedantry, Caroline asserts that she made this bitter and spirited reply : "Your Highness forgets the faithful hearts which in equal fulness beat, or have beaten, for you !"

A little humorous incident, on one occasion, came to relieve the weary life of Caroline and her mother at Claremont. One morning, Stockmar arrived at the villa greatly agitated, as the Prince was of the opinion that he was about to die. Apparently, in the early hours Leopold had inadvertently swallowed the two little golden clamps which he was accustomed to insert between his back teeth on going to bed, as he had the curious habit of grinding his teeth together when asleep, which naturally damaged their enamel. Now, however, Leopold was cursing the day on which he had bought these dangerous instruments, against Stockmar's advice, from a quack dentist. Purges of the most violent nature, the Baron

informed the startled ladies, had been eagerly swallowed by "his gracious Master," who, Stockmar related, was in the most distressing condition of mental collapse. The humour of the situation was only later made apparent when the golden clamps, instead of being discovered where the half-hourly search was diligently made, were found nestling between the sheets and mattress of Leopold's bed.

The last scene of this pathetic little tragedy was enacted in their mean house at Claremont in June, 1830. Caroline must no doubt have written to other members of her family, complaining of the feckless and inconsiderate treatment she had received at the hands of her "husband," with the result that her brother Karl arrived shortly after, at Claremont, and demanded money from Leopold under threat of blackmail. Stockmar was naturally called upon to deal with this delicate situation and he eventually succeeded in despatching both Caroline, Frau Bauer and her brother back to Germany. It is not known whether Leopold was compelled to pay for this final and now welcome release from the Bauers, apart from Caroline's small allowance, but probably Stockmar and prudence, and, let us hope, an uneasy conscience, would insist on adequate financial compensation being made to poor Caroline for two wasted years of her life, during which uncertainty and unhappiness must have far outweighed any snobbish or physical satisfaction she may have enjoyed.

Caroline was discarded by Leopold because she had ceased to arouse his passions and because her presence might, any moment, have become socially and politically inexpedient. His marriage with her, if marriage there was, was subsequently reported to be annulled. In closing this distressing incident, it can only be said that Leopold's relations with Caroline, the Potsdam actress, must be regarded as the most discreditable episode in his life, while the only gainer from this *mésalliance* was the future Queen Victoria, to whom Uncle Leopold was able to present a soup tureen, which he bought with his earnings from "drizzling," while allied, first as the lover, then as the husband, to Fräulein Caroline Bauer.

When Leopold finally abandoned his mistress, he

entertained high hopes of becoming King of Greece, but a few months later, in May 1830, these bright expectations were totally crushed and Caroline might have enjoyed some justifiable satisfaction at the appropriate nemesis which had befallen her heartless husband. But Caroline was probably too sweet and too silly to take pleasure in Leopold's discomfiture, and had she done so, her complacency would, anyhow, have been premature for, within a year of being deprived of the crown of Greece, Leopold was elected King of the Belgians.

To appreciate fully the central climax of Leopold's eventful career, it will be necessary to consider briefly the latter history and condition of the Belgian people before they came to enjoy the possibly unmerited good fortune of securing Leopold for their King.

In 1648, the Dutch won their final independence from Spain, thus confining the Spanish Netherlands to the approximate size of the present Belgian state. By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the Netherlands were handed over to Austria and, towards the end of that century, the Belgian provinces were offered to the Bavarian Elector by the Emperor Joseph II in exchange for the Electorate of Bavaria. But this daring proposal came to nought for, although the childless Elector Charles Theodore was quite prepared to exchange Bavaria for Belgium, his heir, the Duke of Zweibrücken, instigated by Frederick the Great, declined to countenance the proposal. Had the duke, however, been of another mind, not only would the future Kingdom of Belgium have been ruled by a Wittelsbach instead of by a Coburg, but the history of Europe would probably have developed on totally different lines. A united Austria and Bavaria might have withstood the power of Prussia under Bismarck; Austria might have retained the hegemony of Europe and certainly would have had no need to expand in the Balkans, which was one of the direct causes of the Great War.

In 1788, the Belgians successfully revolted from Austria and, two years later, the newly formed Belgian Union declared its independence. This autonomy, however, was destined to be short-lived, for during the French Revolution, the country was seized and held by the Republic.

The Belgians benefited considerably by the reforms instituted by the Republic, which were based on moderate revolutionary principles, and Napoleon, with his famous code and his policy of centralisation, together with the freedom of navigation he maintained on the Scheldt, further increased the prosperity of Belgium, although, in the later days of the first Empire, the Belgians certainly suffered some privation from the effects of the continental blockade, while their menfolk were ruthlessly conscripted for the Napoleonic armies. Nevertheless, a strong pro-French party grew up in the country, which acquired increased influence and prestige when, in 1815, the Belgians were forced into a single state under the domination of Holland. Unfortunately, King William I was a particularly obtuse individual as far as his Belgian subjects were concerned and, instead of respecting their racial and religious susceptibilities, oppressed them with unfair taxation, tried to force them to learn the Dutch language and would have openly persecuted the Catholic Church, had he dared.

Belgium was in consequence seething with discontent when the July Revolution of 1830 swept Charles X off the throne of France and, installed in his place, that affable bourgeois Louis Philippe of Orleans. The answering echo in Belgium was rapid and resonant. On August 24th, in the Brussels Opera House, Daniel Auber's opera, *La Muette de Portici*, better known as *Masaniello*, was being played. It is a revolutionary work, dealing with the rebellion of the Neapolitans under Masaniello against the rule of Spain. On that hot, August night, the audience was unable to resist the appropriate and dramatic sentiment and, when the tenor began to sing his famous air, "Des armes ! Des flambeaux !" the public decided to carry out literally the words of the song and emerged into the streets, drunk with its emotional appeal. The mad enthusiasm of the audience passed to the general populace. Brussels was pillaged. The Belgian Revolution had begun.

The insurrection against Dutch rule had an unexpected and rapid success. The movement was spontaneous and universal in all the Belgian provinces of Holland, and it took King William some time to recover from his surprise

and to organise his forces in order to attempt to crush the rebellion. At the end of September, 1830, the Estates General in Brussels voted the separation of Belgium from Holland and, in the following month, declared Belgium to be an autonomous state. But no decision was arrived at as to what form that state should take ; a republic, a monarchy, an appanage of France ? Indeed this was a European as much as a Belgian problem and, in the ensuing tortuous negotiations, the English Government—or perhaps it would be more correct to give the credit to Palmerston—achieved a brilliant diplomatic victory.

From the English point of view, the ultimate objective was clear ; an independent and stable Belgium with an impartial or, better still, a pro-English ruler. On no account could England allow the Belgian provinces to be absorbed by France ; but she was fully alive to the economic advantages to be gained by the creation of an independent Belgian state, thus weakening the commercial prosperity of Holland. Again Lord Palmerston realised that if the English Government opposed the legitimate desires of the Belgian people for political freedom, the pro-French party in Belgium would be immensely strengthened, and eventually the whole Belgian people would probably turn to France to liberate them from the hated Dutch rule. Certainly, the English policy was quite clear ; to secure for the Belgian provinces their complete independence immune from Dutch and, above all, from French influence or interference.

The policy of King William of Holland was equally clear ; on no account to give way an inch to his rebellious subjects and to reconquer and punish them, with the minimum of delay. Had not the Belgian provinces been restored to the House of Orange at the Congress of Vienna by the united votes of all the great powers ? King William certainly had a good case, and he was supported by the Prussian, Austrian and Russian Governments. Prince Metternich was naturally profoundly scandalised by the course of events. "The starting point of the Belgian question depends entirely on wretched revolutionary ground," he thundered in a letter to Prince Esterhazy on August 24th, 1831. "England is to blame for letting it

arise at all." Metternich was fairly correct in that assertion, and he also quite understood that England was once more at her old trick of covering her self-interests and security by pretending to the world that she was standing up for the rights of a small and downtrodden people.

The point of view of King Louis Philippe was no less definite than that of Lord Palmerston or of King William of Holland; he wished the Belgian provinces to be incorporated in France. He believed that the majority of the Belgians themselves desired it, and he also fully realised what a conspicuous feather in his cap this new acquisition of territory would be, so soon after ascending the throne. His inevitable ambitions regarding Belgium were naturally totally opposed to those of England, and it is greatly to the credit of the King of the French and Lord Palmerston that, despite their fundamental difference of aim, they were both jointly responsible for the ultimate establishment of the Belgian provinces of Holland into an independent and prosperous country.

The opening move in this complicated game was made by the Estates General in Brussels which, in February, 1831, elected the Duke de Nemours, Louis Philippe's second son, to be King of the Belgians. The English reply to this daring move, on the part of the pro-French party, was immediate and crushing. Palmerston threatened the French King with war. Opposed by Russia, Austria and Prussia, Louis Philippe was forced to recognise his isolated position and, on behalf of his son, refused the tempting offer of the Belgian throne.

A period of great confusion ensued in Belgium following this enforced refusal of the Duke de Nemours. The merits of other candidates were inconclusively and acrimoniously debated. These included the Duke of Leuchtenberg, afterwards to become the short-lived husband of Queen Maria da Gloria of Portugal, the Prince of Capua and Prince Otto of Bavaria, who in 1833 began his disturbing reign as first King of the Hellenes. Naturally this procrastination in choosing a King produced evil effects in Belgium since, apart from the lack of any regular form of government, no confidence was felt in the administration of the law, while, owing to the lack of commercial credit

industry was at a standstill and no protection existed for persons or property.

The English Government, however, had not been idle during the early months of 1831 and, having frustrated the popular candidature of the Duke de Nemours, Lord Palmerston decided that Leopold would make an admirable King of the Belgians. In this opinion, he was undoubtedly right. Leopold was now a mature Prince of forty with experience, charm and *savoir-faire*. His talents at the moment were being completely wasted, and everybody appreciated Leopold's "penchant décidé" for a throne while, not unnaturally, the English Government regarded him as half English owing to his close relationship to the Royal Family and his fifteen years' sojourn in this country. The fact also that Leopold was intimate with so many English statesmen, led people to hope that, as King of the Belgians, he would pursue a pro-English policy, while many, including some of the Royal dukes, were anxious to get Leopold out of the way in case a Regency should ever be necessary, owing to the age and ill-health of King William and to the tender years of Princess Victoria.

The English Government, however, fully realised the difficulties with which Leopold would have to contend : with an enraged King of Holland on his north frontier and an embittered Louis Philippe on the south. Obviously only time and firmness would wear down the opposition of the Dutch monarch to an independent Belgium, but the English evolved the brilliant plan of tying the hands of the King of the French by marrying Leopold to one of his daughters. When first this suggestion was made in Paris the King opposed it strongly ; but when later he realised that he could only secure the Belgian throne for his son by fighting the combined powers of England, Prussia, Austria, Russia and probably Holland as well, he promised at a later date to consider the marriage of an Orleans princess with the new King of the Belgians.

Lord Palmerston now decided the way was clear to raise his protégé Prince Leopold to the throne of Belgium. It only remained to secure the consent of the two parties chiefly concerned : the Belgian people and Leopold

himself. Belgium herself, despite her ultimate acquiescence in England's selection, had little to do with the choice of her new King. The people had definitely wanted the Duke de Nemours, a man of the same racial, religious and lingual character as themselves, who would have been supported in their inevitable struggle with the Dutch, by the strong arm of France. Their natural and legitimate aspirations in this direction had been rudely thwarted, and strong diplomatic pressure was brought to bear on the Estates General by England, to force them to accept a German Protestant as their new King. It is indeed remarkable how calmly the Belgian people accepted Lord Palmerston's choice.

On April 20th, the envoys of the Provisional Belgian Government arrived at Marlborough House to offer Leopold the Kingship of their land. Monsieur Lebeau, the Prime Minister, appears to have been desperately anxious to secure Leopold's immediate acceptance, no doubt owing to the precarious state of affairs in Belgium. "I do not exaggerate," he wrote to his envoys in London, "we are faced with an awful catastrophe. French partisans, Republicans, Orangists are combining against us." But Leopold was wary; he remembered Greece, and told the envoys that he would only consent to accept the throne provided he was elected by the overwhelming vote of the people's representatives. This his supporters managed to engineer on June 4th, when Leopold was elected King of the Belgians by 152 votes out of a total of 196. On the 26th, of the same month 1831, Leopold accepted the throne of Belgium, just thirteen months after he had refused the throne of Greece.

Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg was now at long last a Majesty, and it only remained for him to settle his affairs in England before leaving for his new kingdom. These, however, took longer to adjust than at first appeared necessary. Naturally Leopold realised that, as King of a foreign country, he could have no further claim on his £50,000 a year which he had received as an English Prince, and the fact that a question was about to be asked in the House of Lords regarding his further retention of this annuity, hastened him in his decision to abandon it

voluntarily. But he prudently stipulated in his act of renunciation that sufficient annual funds should be provided by the English Government to support his and Princess Charlotte's pet charities as well as to maintain Claremont in a state of complete "habitation" and repair. This gesture of generous renunciation, tempered by judicious foresight, was unfortunately marred by the discovery that Leopold was in debt in England to the tune of £83,000, which so complicated the settlement of his affairs, that it was not until 1834 that they were eventually liquidated, after Leopold had been violently attacked by the English Radicals for retaining his annuity so long. Why Leopold, with an income of £50,000 a year should have incurred such a load of debt remains a mystery, although it is generous to suppose that it was due to his continual disbursements on behalf of his sister, the Duchess of Kent.

Despite these financial complications the new King, accompanied by the enchanted Stockmar, left England on July 16th, *en route* for Brussels. On arrival in Belgium he was strongly advised by his supporters to avoid passing through Ghent, which, it was thought, might provide him with a hostile reception, owing to the alleged affection of that town for the House of Orange. Leopold firmly and wisely refused to be discouraged. "The more reason for going by Ghent," he answered; and he was justified; for Ghent, a little bemused and surprised, received him with polite effusion.

On July 21st, Leopold entered Brussels on horse-back from Laeken. He was dressed as a Belgian General, and as such an independent entity had never previously existed, presumably the uniform must have been of his own design. As he rode through the enthusiastic concourse of his new subjects, on that cloudless July day, perhaps Leopold's thoughts returned to those other thrones, which had been so near his grasp, and to those other uniforms which, at different times he had worn with such eminent and elegant success. The simple smartness of a Coburg cadet, the gorgeous uniform of the French Imperial Guard, which at the time had been so tantalising and desirable, the beautiful white Russian uniform of a Cavalry General,

which had suited him so well, the solid grandeur of an English Field-Marshal, which had consoled him in his bitterest hours, the nebulous vision of a Mexican "sombbrero," the fantastic flipper of an Evzone uniform which had just eluded him, and now the parvenue finery of a Belgian General. . . .

In the Place Royal, Leopold mounted a high platform where the Regent, Monsieur le Baron Chokier handed over his powers and, in front of an improvised throne, the new King swore to observe the Constitution and to maintain the national independence. Then the President of the National Congress, Monsieur de Gerlache, turned to him with the courteous request : " Sire, montez au trône ! "

CHAPTER FIVE

“ Pas de propos légers, Madame.”

LEOPOLD TO LOUISE-MARIE

THE Belgians were, indeed, very fortunate in the attainments and person of their new King, whom Lord Palmerston and King Louis Philippe had foisted upon them. Leopold was now forty years old, at the beginning of that period of perhaps twenty years, when a man is at his intellectual prime, those two decades when an intelligent individual is not so young as to imagine that every new development of opinion or science must, because of its novelty, be inevitably right, or so old as to be convinced that all so-called progress must be intrinsically wrong.

Personally as well Leopold was fit to govern. An intimate knowledge of the English political system on which his constitutional kingdom was founded, was coupled with extensive historical research and a wide familiarity with foreign governments and affairs. Leopold was also by now a first-class linguist, writing and conversing fluently in the German, English, French, Italian, Russian and even Latin languages. Stockmar's unremitting labours had made of Leopold one of the best-informed Princes of his period. Then bitter disappointments, the death of Charlotte and, in a lesser degree of course, his reluctant but inevitable refusal of the throne of Greece had strengthened his determination to overcome every personal and political mortification and had straitened his ambitions into well-defined and unresilient grooves. Those weary years of wandering, after Charlotte's death, waiting for the opportunity which was so reluctant to arise, had endowed him with a tenacity of purpose equal to that which his niece, Queen Victoria, was later to possess.

His mental energy, inquisitiveness and thirst for power were now at their zenith ; unwittingly the Belgian people had accepted, as their King, the most active Prince in Europe.

(Undoubtedly Leopold was also an opportunist.) He was too astute, too ambitious, too active ever to fail to improve the most elusive occasion, and the fact that his influence or capacity for interference, as his enemies said, was so widespread in Europe for thirty years, was little to his credit considering his mental and physical resources. He was, however, fortunate in this respect, that the personal power he wielded in international affairs could be disguised under disinterested and benevolent motives whereas, the desire for power was to Leopold an unconquerable passion and the possession of it an essential stimulus to his being.

Leopold sometimes appears almost inhuman in the perfect arrangement of his mental powers, his practical inability to make mistakes, the brilliant success he made of his thirty odd years in Belgium, and perhaps, above all, in the unnecessarily high view he took of his mission in life. Later he summed up his work in one short, remarkable phrase : " Politically," he once averred, " I have worked for God." There can be no doubt that Leopold had made himself believe this bombastic, almost blasphemous, assertion.

In more superficial matters, Leopold had also many excellent kindly qualities. His natural shyness and a slight stutter produced an endearing impression of modesty, a trait which in reality was totally absent in Leopold's character. Again, when occasion demanded, his conversation could be enlivened by gaiety, though usually streaked with faint irony. Then Leopold was exceptionally cautious, both in personal and public matters, an essential quality in a King, although his famous aphorism, " Never use the post," was somewhat exaggerated even for those days of postal uncertainties and extremely difficult of accomplishment by a less exalted being. Tact was also a gift possessed in large measure by Leopold, although he occasionally failed to practise it in certain letters to his niece Victoria when his natural solicitude ran away with

his customary prudence. Leopold once gave a superb example of tactful behaviour when he was strongly urged by some adviser, to reprimand publicly an erring subject. "I like to praise in a loud voice," he replied, "and scold in a whisper."

In personal appearance Leopold left little to be desired. Tall, thin and well-proportioned, with beautiful hands and large serious brown eyes, the King retained at the age of forty the grace of youth, although through fear of catching a cold and not through baldness, he now wore a thick black "wind-swept" wig. The high forehead, the firm eyes and the pronounced chin added strength to the picture. Leopold was a paragon of elegant determination.

All these qualities of mind and body were instantly required by Leopold on securing the Belgian throne. On July 21st, the new King entered Brussels; a fortnight later, on August 4th, a Dutch army crossed the frontier with the avowed object of reconquering Belgium. King William of Holland had never accepted the resolutions of the London Conference regarding the separation of the Belgian provinces from his Kingdom, and announced that he would never be reconciled to a solution which deprived him entirely of them, in view of the indisputable rights conceded to him in 1815. Russia, Austria and Prussia supported him in this defiance of the treaty approved by England and France: Metternich, more embittered than ever by the successful policy of those democratic countries, guided the combined opposition against the freedom of Belgium. The Dutch themselves, wounded in their vanity, were united in their desire for vengeance, particularly on Leopold, to them, the arrogant figurehead of seditious rebellion. The Dutch newspaper, *Le Journal de la Haye*, summed up the popular feeling in Holland against Leopold. "Let Monsieur de Saxe-Coburg enjoy his triumph a few days longer, let him strut as a comedy King on the boards of Brussels! But when he hears the cannon of Holland he will realise his position."

So, on that August day, exactly eighty-three years before she was to be violated by a far mightier enemy, Belgium, an independent nation, felt for the first time the miseries of invasion. Belgium had an ill-organised army of 25,000

men ; Holland an extremely efficient one of 50,000, led by the Prince of Orange. Once more Leopold and "Young Frog" found themselves pitted against each other. Before, it had been for the hand of the future Queen of England, and on his own merits Leopold had won, now it was a struggle for a throne, and Leopold knew that alone he was powerless and that, lacking outside assistance, "Young Frog" this time would win. Therefore with reluctance he turned to England and France and called on them to carry out their treaty obligations and come to his aid against the Dutch invasion. Louis Philippe, delighted at this opportunity of securing a grip on Belgium, instantly sent a large army across her southern frontier, under the command of General Gérard, in the vanguard of which served two of the sons of the King of the French, the Dukes of Orleans and Nemours. England, however, far from pleased by Louis Philippe's eager interference, contented her conscience by moving Admiral Codrington and his fleet from Plymouth to Dover.

Despite his desperate need of assistance from the French, Leopold for once allowed his pride to get the better of his discretion and, for patriotic reasons, delayed the advance of his allies until he had joined arms alone with the Dutch. This courageous gesture was very naturally catastrophic in results. The Belgian General Daine was completely routed outside Liège and was compelled to fall back in the greatest confusion on Louvain. Leopold was himself with this army and, according to contemporary reports, carried out the duties of a junior officer with conspicuous bravery. Indeed it was said that, had the Dutch cavalry not been so exhausted by its rapid advance, the King would certainly have fallen into the hands of the enemy. "He fought as pluckily as a subaltern," declared General Belliard, "and without him the Belgian army would have been annihilated." The utter defeat of the Belgian forces can also be gauged by the astonishing fact that, after the retreat, Leopold was by chance discovered hiding from the Dutch in a peasant's hut practically unprotected and reclining on a bundle of straw. It is even asserted that to keep up his spirits the new King of the Belgians was found whistling the strains

of a popular song. It is perhaps permissible to imagine that the melody chosen was Masaniello's aria in *La Muette de Portici*, "Des armes ! des flambeaux," probably pitched in a minor key. Despite this, the King had enjoyed, during the battle, one striking personal success : he had captured a bridge in the vicinity of Malmis by the simple expedient of sitting on it.

The French army, however, was now rapidly advancing and King William, unwilling to embark on a war with France as well as Belgium, slowly withdrew his forces behind his frontier, although he refused to retire from Antwerp, which was now closely besieged by the French. It was clear, however, that the arrival of the French army at Mons in the middle of August alone had saved Leopold and his entire forces from capitulating to the Dutch.

In this, their first campaign the Belgian troops, although outnumbered, had shown abject cowardice in the face of the enemy, flying for safety whenever they came into contact with the Dutch. Indeed their conduct was scornfully remarked on abroad, public opinion in England being particularly severe. The *Gentleman's Magazine* asserted that Leopold's honour alone came out unscathed, and added, "the Belgians have lost the sympathy of Europe." Although that censure was unnecessarily harsh, Leopold returned to Brussels after this short and inglorious campaign thoroughly disgusted with the martial ineptitude of his new subjects. "Part of the army consisted of traitors," he remarked later with understandable acerbity, "the others ran away."

On August 23rd, an armistice was arranged by the powers to last until October 10th, but long before the latter date, it was obvious that the French far more than the Dutch were the enemies of Belgian independence. Louis Philippe was now thoroughly ensconced in Belgium and actively engaged in besieging Antwerp, to which, although the Dutch might have small claim, the French had none at all. Lord Palmerston was furious at the impertinence of the French King ; he had not contrived the freedom of the Belgian provinces from Holland to make a present of them to the French. Poor Leopold was now in a thorough quandary ; originally compelled to seek the assistance of

Louis Philippe to save his new kingdom from King William, he now saw that the French evinced every disposition to stay. In September, Leopold implored Louis Philippe to evacuate Belgium. Lord Palmerston's position was stronger. He threatened France with war.

England's threat of war was not taken very seriously in France, and it is doubtful if the English Government would have gone much further than withdrawing its representative from Paris and making a few naval demonstrations in the Channel. Anyhow, this appears to have been the opinion of Prince Talleyrand, who regarded the moment as favourable for proposing a division of Belgian territory between Prussia, Holland and France. But Prussia spoilt this astute suggestion by declining to sanction any increase of land to France, although she herself might have benefited by the arrangement. Naturally Talleyrand's unsuccessful manœuvre quickly reached Palmerston's ears and made him more bellicose than ever, while this discreditable intrigue, on the part of the Prince, also largely accounts for Stockmar's lifelong hatred of France.

The situation of King Leopold was now becoming desperate. Assailed on the one side by the demands of the Dutch and on the other by the military pressure of the French, his personal position in Belgium was further weakened by the new resolutions of the London Conference which, owing to the success of King William's military joy-ride into Belgium, felt compelled to modify the previous territorial arrangements. The London Conference therefore decided that a section of Luxembourg and Limburg, then held by the Belgian forces, had to be ceded to Holland. For a moment Leopold's courage failed him. Bitterly disappointed by the tepid attitude of the English Government and the callous oppression of the French he threatened to abdicate. It was due entirely to the stern influence of Stockmar that Leopold refrained from this irrevocable gesture. All the early autumn this indefatigable friend had been negotiating in London on Leopold's behalf, and found, that owing to the effrontery of the French, the mass of public opinion at that moment was strongly in favour of Holland. Even *The Times*,

according to the Baron, had been bought by the Dutch. Hemmed in by this ring of formidable difficulties, and forbidden by Stockmar to abdicate, Leopold shouldered his responsibilities with fortitude and by tact and diplomacy eventually effected a brilliant escape from this apparent *impasse*.

He began with the Belgian Chamber and compelled it to accept the new resolutions of the London Conference on November 15th, 1831. It was a bitter pill for all to swallow, but thereby he hoped to give a proof to the English Government of his sweet reasonableness towards the Dutch, although he knew full well that, to King William, the new concessions would appear of little value. Leopold then decided to deal with the French, and discreetly reminded Louis Philippe of his former promise to consider a marriage between himself and an Orleans princess. Leopold realised the immense importance of this marriage to his and Belgium's future and, like the English Government, which cordially accepted his suggestion, knew that the alliance would afford him almost certain security against the French desire to annex a part of his country. Louis Philippe would hardly dare to violate the territory of his daughter, the Queen of the Belgians.

But Leopold also saw in this intimate connection with the French Royal Family a most welcome support against possible English interference. He was well aware of the English habit of applying the thumb-screw when it suited her purpose, and besides, Leopold had no intention of relying entirely on England to keep him on his throne. The ability to play off England against France in any future contingency appealed to Leopold's subtle brain. During many years in England he had learnt much of that useful theory—the Balance of Power!

So Leopold approached Louis Philippe and asked him for the hand of his daughter, the Princess Louise-Marie of Orleans. The King vacillated. To give Louise-Marie in matrimony to Leopold would mean that he must finally abandon all hope of annexing Belgium. That would hardly increase the popularity of the new Orleanist dynasty. Anyhow, what had King Leopold to offer in

exchange? Leopold was prepared, as usual, and suggested to France that the Barrier should be abolished.

Now the Barrier was a line of fortresses built in 1815 across the Franco-Belgian frontier at the demand of the English Government. These fortresses were particularly irksome to French pride and useless to Leopold when once he had secured, as his bride, the daughter of Louis Philippe. In England, however, the maintenance of the Barrier was regarded as a matter of principle, and the fact that the Duke of Wellington had originally insisted on its erection and was in consequence a strong advocate of its retention, once more placed Leopold in opposition to England. The Belgian King, however, was determined to overcome the ducal obstinacy, fully realising that, in any case, the fortresses were now obsolete and therefore powerless to resist a French attack.

So, in the spring of 1832, General Goblet, one of Leopold's few reliable emissaries, was sent on a special mission to London in order to cajole the Duke and the English Government into a more reasonable frame of mind. Apparently the General's preliminary efforts were attended by small success, for in June of that year, Leopold insinuated into the negotiations a personal note of flattery. "Tell the Duke of Wellington," he wrote to his representative in London, "that strolling yesterday in the neighbourhood of Waterloo, I mused on that heroic will of his to . . . victory." How far the hard-bitten Wellington succumbed to the royal blandishments is unknown, but anyhow in his negotiations with the English Government, General Goblet was comparatively successful, since an agreement was reached that five forts of the Barrier should be destroyed in deference to French wishes. His position thus strengthened *vis-à-vis* the French, King Leopold set off for Paris in May, 1832, in order to overcome Louis Philippe's remaining prejudices against allowing his daughter Louise-Marie from becoming the first Queen of the Belgians. This visit to Paris was completely successful and, by securing the daughter of the French King for his bride, Leopold won a great diplomatic victory as well as the invaluable support of the French Royal Family for his throne.

Before considering the personal side of Leopold's marriage with Louise-Marie of Orleans, a marriage which secured for Belgium the permanent good will of England and France, it will be interesting to observe how Leopold dealt with the remaining refractory powers. Of these the most important was Austria, led by the redoubtable Prince Metternich, known in the Byzantine language of the Ballplatz as the "Celsissimus," who had, of course, viewed the Belgian upheaval with sour misgivings. Fortunately, however, Leopold had formed a friendship with the Austrian Chancellor during the Congress of Vienna, and this advantageous connection Leopold now exploited with his customary skill. His letter to the Prince in June, 1832, was a masterpiece. "I can only rejoice," he wrote, "that I have restored monarchical and religious order in these beautiful provinces, indeed better and more completely than in any of the older states. . . . There is, moreover, the Catholic Church and the happy position in which it finds itself here. That is one reason why the Church is deeply concerned for the independence of the country, and is ready to make material sacrifices to remain Belgian. Even the Emperor Joseph had more than one conflict with this Catholicism (a pertinent and painful allusion for Metternich). . . . The country is as quiet and good as possible. When recently I was away for a whole week there was not the smallest disturbance, although a number of the French had come in for purposes which have since clearly transpired. Nothing could be more striking than the difference between France and Belgium : here religion exercises a beneficent influence. There is not the least trace of Republicanism."

This letter is a good example of Leopold's personal system of diplomacy and of his great knowledge of men. He knew that the two weak spots of the "Celsissimus" were the Catholic Church and the legitimate and absolute monarchy and, although he himself was a Protestant and an altogether illegitimate and constitutional King of an entirely Catholic country, yet by a little judicious window-dressing, he managed in time to mollify the inflexible Metternich.

When at last it became possible to send a Belgian envoy

to Vienna, (Baron von Loc was chosen,) he was presented by Leopold to the Prince with the following recommendation: "I commend Baron Loc to your protection. He has nothing in common with the Revolution, or any revolutions, and will always be only the envoy of his master." The Austrian Chancellor, however, was most suspicious of the Baron's activities and wrote firmly to Leopold that he should direct his Minister in Vienna to "go slowly and give no one occasion to regard him as a representative of revolution."

A further proof that Metternich was by no means entirely reconciled to Belgium and her King was afforded by his choice of an envoy to Brussels, which could hardly have been more pointed. He selected for this post Count Dietrichstein, a man of extreme conservative opinions who viewed the new state of Belgium and its King with indignant displeasure. Indeed he made no secret of his sympathies with the pro-Dutch opposition, and later in 1834, even went so far as to refuse to attend the September festival, the annual commemoration of Belgium freedom, because, as he wrote to the "Celsissimus," "I will have no part in festivities in honour of a Revolution which robbed His Dutch Majesty of part of his Kingdom." Nevertheless, although Count Dietrichstein was a continual thorn in Leopold's side, the fact that Austria had consented to appoint any envoy at all to the Belgian Court was of immense importance for the King's prestige, and it certainly induced Prussia to recognise the new Kingdom. In April, 1832, Austria and Prussia signed the famous twenty-four articles drawn up by the London Conference on November 15th, 1831, guaranteeing the independence and neutrality of Belgium, although four months later Frederick William III, the Prussian King, was still writing to Leopold urging him to make some gesture to the monarch, meaning King William of Holland, upon whom "the whole affair had laid so many and, he might say, such cruel sacrifices."

Russia and Holland now alone remained unmoved by Leopold's blandishments. The Tsar, in fact, would not permit the question of Leopold and his parvenue kingdom to be raised in his presence. He had been already suffi-

ciently embittered by the change of dynasty in France and he could hardly be expected to countenance rebels in Belgium, while he was so busily engaged in suppressing his own rebels in Poland. Besides these political considerations family matters intervened to exacerbate the Tsar still further, for his own sister had married the Prince of Orange, whose father, King William, had been despoiled of half his kingdom with the consent of the complacent Powers. No, nothing would induce the Tsar of All the Russias to sign the infamous twenty-four articles and thus sanction an act of spoliation unparalleled since the days of General Bonaparte !

No doubt in his adamant attitude towards Belgium the Tsar was spurred on by his brother-in-law, for "Young Frog" can have entertained few friendly feelings for Leopold, who had first deprived him of his fiancée, the heiress to the crown of England, by his superior physical charms and now had robbed him of half his future kingdom by his far superior diplomatic technique. Indeed, Orange once said of Leopold : "Voilà un homme qui a pris ma femme et mon royaume." "Young Frog," who was consoled for the loss of Princess Charlotte by the embraces of a Russian Grand Duchess, succeeded to his father's diminished patrimony on the latter's abdication in 1840. He himself died in 1849. Both the person and life of this unfortunate Prince were curiously sordid. He is even reported to have stolen his wife's jewels.

Although Russia remained obdurate, Leopold was now able to tackle King William of Holland with increased power. In the autumn of 1831, Stockmar's work in London had begun to bear fruit with an improvement in the tone of English public opinion towards the new kingdom, although the gloomy Baron had been horrified by Leopold's warlike preparations in the late winter, before Austria and Prussia had been induced to sign the twenty-four articles. Indeed Leopold, anticipating a renewal of war with the Dutch, had strengthened his forces by enrolling a certain number of French and Polish officers. The English Government had instantly protested against this disturbing innovation, being not unnaturally suspicious of French influence in the Belgian army and unwilling to allow the

Tsar to be further agitated by Leopold enrolling amongst his troops the *élite* of his rebellious subjects. Leopold, however, had a ready answer. He drew the attention of His Majesty's Government to the thousands of German and Swiss nationals serving in the forces of King William of Holland. But Stockmar was critical and pessimistic. "I lift up my voice in warning," he wrote to Leopold; "I have often before been a Cassandra."

On November 5th, 1832, however, Stockmar could feel comparatively at ease. Austria and Prussia had now recognised the new kingdom and, on that date, England and France, after endless intrigues and delays, actually combined in laying an embargo on all Dutch ships in their harbours and seized at sea several ships flying the Dutch flag with the object of bringing King William to his senses. The more or less determined support of England, after the general suspicion and hostility of the previous year, was a great asset to Belgium, and the losses caused by the embargo as well as the fall of Antwerp to the French on December 23rd, compelled King William to grant Belgium an armistice until a definite agreement could be reached between the two Powers.

The question of the surrender of Antwerp to Belgium deeply affected King William's pride, which was not unnatural considering the brilliant defence made by his troops and, at one moment, the Tsar of Russia, either from misplaced motives of being helpful or else with the desire of further embroiling England and France, suggested that the Dutch army in Antwerp should, in the first instance, capitulate to English rather than to Belgian troops. King Leopold, however, wisely declined to entertain such a ludicrous and dangerous proposal.

Although King William was now compelled by outside pressure to surrender Antwerp, he refused to give up two of the Antwerp forts with the consequence that King Leopold declined to surrender those parts of Limburg and Luxembourg which had been ceded to Holland in the treaty. This delicate situation lasted until March 14th, 1838, when King William declared that he was prepared to accept the twenty-four articles. But it will be seen later that, when the King of Holland made that welcome gesture

of reconciliation towards Belgium, King Leopold was by no means so enamoured of the decisions of the London Conference as he had been six years earlier.

Christmas, 1832, saw the virtual establishment of the new kingdom of Belgium on the basis of the mutual recognition of the Powers, but the credit for the relative security of her independence was entirely due to the skill and patience of her new King. One country alone sincerely desired to establish the independence of Belgium—England ; but England, as everyone was aware, desired it for her own ends.

It is pleasant to turn from Leopold's intricate relations with foreign powers to the domestic significance of his new married life. On August 9th, 1832, at Compiègne, King Leopold of the Belgians was married to Princess Louise-Marie of Orleans, eldest daughter of King Louis Philippe of the French. The civil formalities took place in the state closet of the King in the Royal palace, with Baron Pasquier, President of the Chamber of Peers, acting as chief officer or registrar of the civil estate. The civil records of the Royal House of France recount that, when the whole company was assembled, it included nearly every member of the Orleans family. Baron Pasquier thus addressed the bridegroom : "Most high, mighty and excellent Prince Leopold I, King of the Belgians, Duke of Saxony, Prince of Coburg-Gotha, will you take in marriage the most high and mighty Princess Louise-Marie Therèse Caroline Isabelle, Princess d'Orléans, here present ?" And thereupon the said most high, mighty and excellent Prince answered : "I will." The Registrar then turned to the bride and said : "Most high and mighty Princess Louise-Marie Therèse Caroline Isabelle, Princess d'Orléans, will you take in marriage the most high, mighty and excellent Prince Leopold, first of the name, King of the Belgians, Duke of Saxony, Prince of Coburg-Gotha, here present ?" And thereupon the said most high and mighty Princess answered : "I will." The Registrar then declared, "by command of the King and in the name of the law," that Leopold and Louise-Marie were man and wife. The certificate of marriage was then signed, and below the name of Baron Pasquier were written the

following signatures : " Louis Philippe, Marie Amélie, Leopold, Louise d'Orléans."

After the civil formalities, the marriage ceremony took place and was performed according to the rites of both the Catholic and Lutheran Churches—an unusual indulgence on the part of the former Church. The Bishop of Meaux was the celebrant in the chapel of the Royal Palace. The Lutheran service was enacted in a room of the palace specially converted for that purpose. When this double ceremony was over we are informed by the *Gentleman's Magazine* that, " after a visit to Pierrefond the Royal bridegroom led his blooming partner to his Belgian home."

Who was this Orleans Princess who, at the age of twenty, was sacrificed on the altar of matrimony to bear children for the new Belgian dynasty and to settle one point at issue in the interminable quarrels of England and France? Princess Louise-Marie was the second child and eldest daughter of King Louis Philippe and Queen Marie Amélie, and her father was the son of the famous or infamous Philippe Egalité and Louise-Marie Adélaïde of Bourbon, daughter of the Duke of Penthièvre. As the Belgian Royal Family, with the obvious exception of Leopold, is directly descended from Louis Philippe, it is interesting to bear in mind the possibility that the bourgeois monarch was not the son of Philip, Duke of Orleans, and his wife at all, but the child of Lorenzo Chiappini, a policeman at the village of Modigliana in Tuscany. The story went that the Duke and Duchess of Orleans, travelling under the incognito of the Count and Countess of Joinville, happened to be passing through Modigliana in April, 1773, when the Duchess gave birth to a daughter. Horrified at the prospect of losing his wife's large inheritance, which in the event of her dying without bearing him a son would revert to other members of the Penthièvre family, the Duke succeeded in bribing Chiappini and his wife to substitute their newly-born son for his unwanted daughter. This child, who was called Maria Stella, went, as a child, on the stage at Florence and, at the age of thirteen, married the first Lord Newborough. In 1821 Chiappini, her supposed father, died, leaving her a letter, in which he confessed



Princess Louise-Marie of Orléans, Leopold's second wife. By Scheffer.

"A small oval face, remarkably devoid of interest, except for the

that he was not her father and hinted that the Duke of Orleans was.

Armed with this astonishing confession, Maria Stella dedicated the rest of her life to establish her identity and, in 1824, actually obtained judgment in her favour in the Faenza courts, which declared that the Count of Joinville had exchanged his daughter for the son of Lorenzo Chiappini. Greatly encouraged by this judgment, as well as by the widely expressed opinion on her striking resemblance to the Duke of Orleans, Maria Stella cleverly chose the year 1830, when Louis Philippe had just secured his throne, to publish the proofs of her identity in book form under the engaging title : *Stella, ou un échange d'une demoiselle du plus haut rang contre un garçon de plus vile condition*. Naturally the enemies of the new régime were enchanted by this effusion, but the *garçon de plus vile condition* treated the whole affair with amused contempt and allowed Marie Etoile d'Orléans, as she called herself, to continue to live in Paris, where she died in poverty and obscurity in 1843. The claim of Maria Stella to be the daughter of Philip, Duke of Orleans has been exhaustively but inconclusively debated and it still remains one of the most interesting and baffling problems of nineteenth-century history.

However spurious the descent of her father, Louis Philippe, may have been, Louise-Marie's mother, Marie Amélie, was certainly the daughter of King Ferdinand IV of Naples and his wife, the Archduchess Maria Carolina, the daughter of the Empress Maria Theresa. Consequently, even if Louise-Marie was descended on the one side from an Italian policeman, she certainly had also the blood of the Hapsburgs in her veins. Her father and mother married in 1809 in Palermo, where they were both living in exile, the one from France, the other from Naples. Louise-Marie was born in Palermo in 1812.

Marie Amélie, nicknamed "La Santa," owing to her piety, was a prolific breeder and, besides the Queen of the Belgians, she had seven other children and, although Louise-Marie retained all her life the most lively interest in her family, it would appear from her dependent character and lack of initiative that she had been little encouraged

at home. There hangs a portrait of Louise-Marie in the Musée Condé at Chantilly, painted in the early 'forties, which shows her as a young matron of thirty. She is dressed in black, presumably in mourning for her eldest brother, the Duke of Orleans, who was killed in a carriage accident in Paris in 1842. Her long fair curls frame a small oval face, peculiarly devoid of interest, except for the distant religious eyes, which seem to be dwelling on the eternal Verities. Her expression is hesitating and shy, one can almost see those thin tight lips tremble. Louise-Marie is alleged to have possessed originally an exuberant disposition, but it is clear from this picture that some ten years of married life had banished all her innate gaiety.

Naturally Louise-Marie's opinions had not been asked regarding her marriage to Leopold, although it is to be hoped that she was shown a letter written to her father by her fiancé shortly before her marriage. "It is the amiable Princess," wrote Leopold, "and not her portion that interests me." Actually it was her position as daughter of the King of the French which interested Leopold most, although considering her father, who was an excellent business man, was creditably reputed to have possessed a fortune of eight million pounds before he ascended the throne, it is unlikely that Leopold was entirely uninterested in her dowry. Indeed it is to be feared that Leopold's interest in the person of "the amiable Princess" was somewhat academic.

It is clear, however, that Louise-Marie was by no means displeased with the husband provided by her Papa. Although, when crossing the frontier into Belgium after their marriage at Compiègne, the young Queen burst into tears—an exhibition of sensibility which, according to Louise-Marie, was tactfully copied by her husband—she wrote ecstatically to her mother shortly after, about Leopold: "It is impossible to find a man less egotistical, more delicate, more normal, more religious, more healthy, or of such a sweet and equal humour." Posterity, however, cannot agree with her verdict. Few figures in history can have been more egotistical or less influenced by religion than Leopold, while his morals left much to be desired.

Leopold's description of his bride in a letter to his niece, Princess Victoria, on August 31st, 1832, is certainly much more in accordance with the truth: "She is extremely gentle and amiable," the King wrote, ". . . she values goodness, merit and virtue more than beauty. . . . Music, unfortunately, she is not very fond of, though she plays on the harp. I believe there is some idleness in this case. . . ." The formality of his description of Louise-Marie's good qualities, the omission of any mention of love towards his bride, and his disappointment in her lack of musical attainments reveal in this letter more of Leopold's than of Louise-Marie's character. We can rest assured, however, that "the idleness in this case" was soon rectified.

That the young Queen was, from the first, so reconciled to her marriage with a man over double her age, may be attributed, apart from Leopold's charm and good looks, to the accommodating view he took on religious matters. Louise-Marie, like all her family, was a devout Catholic and, although Louis Philippe would never have secured his daughter's advancement at the expense of her faith, naturally she was gratified by Leopold's reasonable attitude towards her religion.

It has often been taken for granted that Leopold abandoned Lutheranism on becoming the King of a Catholic country and was received into the Catholic Church. This, however, is not the case. Leopold remained a Lutheran all his life, and on his deathbed received the ministrations of a Protestant clergyman. In fact, in accordance with Stockmar's advice he even built a Lutheran chapel at Laeken. "A Lutheran chapel is indispensable," wrote the Baron. "People say, 'We don't ask whether he is a Lutheran, but we ask whether he goes to his own church in his own way.'" The following extract will show Leopold's position regarding his own and his wife's religion. "As the Queen and perhaps the Princess (Louise-Marie) herself consider it of great importance that the children . . . should be Catholics . . . I have no objection." It is impossible that Leopold should have thus expressed himself if he either was or had any intention of becoming a Catholic.

Much confusion has arisen owing to this erroneous conclusion that Leopold became a Catholic, which perhaps was due to the conjecture that a change of religion would be essential for a Protestant becoming King of the Belgians, and also to the fact that, practically nothing is known either by hearsay or direct from Leopold himself as to his religious opinions. No doubt Leopold, situated as he was, as well as his advisers, considered it more prudent to ignore the question of the King's religion. Any student, however, of Leopold's life cannot help being struck by the complete lack of religious impulse in his career, probably owing to a distrust of revealed religion. But Leopold wisely realised that a Protestant who ignores his religion is far less disedifying both to Catholics and Protestants alike than a bad Catholic. Apart then from the fact that Louise-Marie must have been naturally disappointed that Leopold did not belong to her religion, she must have been gratified by his tolerant religious views.

The complete dependence of Louise-Marie on her husband is the dominant note of their married life. Although this show of subjection to a husband was fashionable and therefore essential a hundred years ago, few women can have exercised so little influence on her spouse as Louise-Marie. For this, however, it is hard to blame her. Leopold married her for obvious political and dynastic reasons. He did not love her any more than he had loved Caroline Bauer ; that emotion he had felt once in his life for Charlotte and it was never to recur and, judging from his physical faithlessness to Louise-Marie, he did not even rank her in desirability as high as his mistresses. For although children were essential to establish his line, it is unlikely that Leopold desired his wife for any other purpose. Under these circumstances the Queen was unable to use the strongest lever a married woman can possess to obtain her desires.

It has already been related that, before her marriage, Louise-Marie was said to have been gay in disposition, a trait which a later portrait would seem to deny her. Indeed, shortly after her marriage, when Leopold was opening the Chamber of Deputies, the Queen was still capable of laughing in public. It is recounted that at this

ceremony Lord Acton, the English Minister, being somewhat hard of hearing, leant his head on the edge of his box in order to hear better. The somewhat unusual attitude adopted by his lordship caused the Queen to burst into hilarious laughter, in which she was joined by her ladies and of which no doubt the King must have strongly disapproved. If Louise-Marie's sense of humour was as puerile and undignified as this exhibition of jocularitv would tend to show, Leopold can hardly be blamed if he took steps to repress it, but he was certainly too ruthless in his determination to crush all levity in his wife. Two rejoinders made by him when Louise-Marie indulged in some innocent witticism have passed into history. On one occasion, maybe on their honeymoon, a gay sally on the part of the Queen was instantly crushed by the withering reply: "Pas de plaisanteries, Madame." Another time a harmless suggestion made by Louise-Marie was killed by the firm retort: "Pas de propos légers, Madame." It is improbable that the proposal was more improper or insidious than a moonlight walk in the gardens of Laeken with the husband she loved.

Poor Louise-Marie! So much of her early married life was spent in hiding her natural exuberance of spirits that, soon there was nothing left of them to hide. Leopold's promiscuity also further depressed her and, being twenty years younger than the King, no doubt she expected to remain the principal object of his desires. Although early disappointed in this hope, Louise-Marie does not appear to have faltered in her love towards Leopold and, at the age of thirty-four, she wrote rather pathetically to her mother that she felt "*une sorte de honte pour lui d'être déjà si vieille.*"

Distractions and interests for Louise-Marie were few and far between. Denied the confidence of her husband, she naturally was totally ignorant of current affairs, and it is recounted that one of the few occasions on which Leopold abandoned himself to uproarious laughter occurred when he read in a German newspaper that the Queen was wont to meddle in politics. A deep interest in her own family and the devout practice of her religion were in fact the only distractions left for Louise-Marie, and an amusing

sidelight is thrown on her rigid moral outlook by a little incident which happened after the birth of her first child. It was necessary to secure the services of a wet-nurse and Leopold busied himself in this purely feminine question with his customary thoroughness. Numbers of applicants were interviewed by the King and Queen who, however, failed to agree on the individual most suitable to fulfil these important duties. Leopold's selection, in fact, had fallen on an unmarried applicant. An unmarried wet-nurse ! Louise-Marie was horrified and firmly refused to consider a proposal which openly encouraged immorality. The outcome of this agreeable little storm in a tea-cup is related by the Queen to her mother in five triumphant words : "*Le roi rit, mais cède.*"

Such victories over her husband were, however, infrequent and, indeed, she rarely dared to join issue with the adamant and omniscient Leopold. In her father and mother and, above all, in her brothers and sisters, Louise-Marie was allowed by the King to take a filial but discreet interest. To both her parents she gave the unquestioning respect, then the fashion, coupled in her case with genuine affection. Whenever she referred to her father in her letters home, it was always "*l'excellent père,*" until 1848, when it plaintively changed to "*malheureux père.*" Of her brothers, the handsome Joinville she admired the most, perhaps on account of his military renown gained in North Africa, and when disaster overtook her father, she believed to her death with passionate but mistaken faith that Joinville would retrieve the fortunes of her family.

Louise-Marie had only two sisters, both younger than herself : Marie who married Prince Alexander of Württemberg, and Clementine who married the immensely rich Duke August of Coburg-Kohary. Of these the former was the favourite of Louise-Marie, and her death in 1839, two years after marriage, was a great loss to her eldest sister. Princess Alexander's last words were piously recorded in Louise-Marie's diary. "*Mes amis, voyez la puissance de la religion,*" said the dying Princess to her family. "*J'ai vingt-cinq ans, je suis heureuse, bien heureuse, et je meurs contente.*" Those words, though courageous and sincere, may sound a trifle sententious to-day, but

they were of great consolation to Louise-Marie. With the remainder of her family, all boys, their eldest sister had little to do, for marrying at twenty, her influence was early removed from the younger children. Orléans, who married Princess Helena of Mecklenburg, was two years older, while Nemours, whom Leopold allied to Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg, was only two years her junior, but Joinville, d'Aumale and Montpensier could only benefit from the distant interest but constant prayers of their sister Louise-Marie.

A new and desirable interest was provided for the Queen on July 24th, 1833, with the arrival of a son and heir. The child, however, was sickly from birth and, to the general sorrow of the whole country, died less than a year later, on May 16th, 1834. Leopold must have felt deeply disappointed and possibly even alarmed. Had he not experienced a similar catastrophe with the baby boy of his English bride? A witness of the royal grief was much impressed: "He is crushed and afflicted to a degree which would touch the hardest heart." The Queen's feelings can easily be imagined. Apart from her natural motherly sorrow, the fact that she had failed to produce a healthy heir for her exigent husband must have made poor Louise-Marie regard herself as a maternal failure. Leopold's grave and mournful eyes must have been a continual but unmerited reproach.

The next year, however, was more propitious for Louise-Marie. On April 9th, 1835, another son was born at Brussels who, created the Duke of Brabant in 1840, eventually succeeded to the throne as Leopold II. In 1837 was born Philip, Count of Flanders, grandfather of the present King of the Belgians, and in 1840 the only daughter, Marie Charlotte, the famed and unfortunate Empress of Mexico.

Louise-Marie was as loved as a mother as she was respected as a wife. She was a pious, affectionate early-Victorian Mama, whom her children severally and justly adored, and although the later activities of the Duke of Brabant, after he had ascended the throne, would have filled his mother with shame, it must be remembered that not only was the influence of the Queen removed from

her son, when he was only fifteen, but also he had obviously inherited from his father his promiscuous sexual life.

Louise-Marie's refreshing opinions of persons and events during the eighteen years of her married life will be mentioned as they occur. They are always shrewd and sometimes hard, so that one often wonders if Leopold was wise in ignoring, politically, his wife. For the moment we can take leave of Louise-Marie being presented by the King to the magistrates of Brussels shortly after her marriage. It was, indeed, a satisfactory occasion for Leopold, exhibiting to the dignitaries of his kingdom the first Queen of the Belgians, the daughter of the King of the French. He made the most of the opportunity: "*Elle est petite fille de Marie Thérèse,*" he announced proudly, "*qui aimait les Belges et que les Belges n'ont pas oubliée.*" It was a pity that he could not add the glowing encomium of a perfervid Orleanist who once declared of King Louis Philippe's family: "*Tous les fils sont braves, comme toutes les filles sont chastes.*" At any rate, as he contemplated his new and compact little kingdom and his very important, though modest and respectful wife, he could reiterate his favourite aphorism, made, perhaps, for the first time after a ceremony in Carlton House in 1816: "*La grande affaire, c'est le succès.*"

CHAPTER SIX

“ Dear Uncle is given to believe he must rule the roost everywhere. However, that is not a necessity.”

VICTORIA TO ALBERT

THE interior politics of the Belgian Kingdom have rarely possessed features of outstanding interest—except presumably to Belgians themselves—and although, in later times, this circumstance may have been due to the good sense of her statesmen, in the early years of the monarchy it was entirely due to the good sense of her King.

Leopold's guiding principle at the beginning of his reign, and indeed to its end, was to secure the support of every class of his subjects in the defence and unification of his realm. He explained his attitude to the Belgian deputies soon after acceding to the throne in the following general and rather sententious terms : “ J'ai appris à ne considérer le pouvoir que sous une point de vue philosophique ; je ne l'ai désiré que pour faire le bien.”

The people of Belgium were indeed on the side of their King, but many nobles, who had enjoyed considerable privileges under the Dutch rule, which had been quickly abolished by Leopold, felt their prestige lowered in the eyes of the nation, particularly as they were now the subjects of a monarchy founded on a revolution. These exalted pro-Orangists were encouraged in their passive resistance to the new regime by the intriguing and defamatory policy initiated by Metternich and carried out through the Austrian Envoy and the Prussian Minister, Count von Arnim. But it was naturally Count Dietrichstein who was the main foreign supporter of the pro-Orangist nobles, amongst whom the Duke d'Ursel and the Prince de Ligne were the ringleaders. The Count referred to the co-operation of the Catholic and Liberal parties

which had united to secure Belgian independence as "the monstrous alliance of Catholicism and Jacobinism," while the sight of the tree of liberty planted outside the Royal Palace and hung with "tricolour rags," inevitably spurred on the Austrian Envoy to a renewed outburst of undiplomatic behaviour.

The people of Belgium, in company with their King, were by 1834 exasperated by the disloyal attitude of the pro-Orangist nobles and, in April of that year, an opportunity was afforded them of expressing their feelings in an appropriate manner. It had been arranged that the horses of the former household of the Prince of Orange should be sold by auction and amongst the number was the actual animal ridden by "Young Frog" at Waterloo. The disaffected nobles therefore proceeded to organise a subscription to buy these horses and publicly announced their intention of presenting them to the Prince. Intense indignation prevailed in Brussels as the result of this announcement, and fuel was added to the flames by the violent attitude adopted by Leopold's Master of the Horse, the Marquis de Chasteler, who, according to the Prince de Ligne, declared that "he would have the horse, which the Prince rode in the glorious battle of Waterloo, bought, and would put it in a dung-cart."

On April 3rd, fierce anti-Orangist riots broke out in Brussels and, for two days, the houses of the aristocracy of that faction were sacked by the people; the Palace of the Prince de Ligne being, suitably enough, the first to be destroyed. Accurate lists of the adherents of the Prince of Orange had been circulated and the press in general had encouraged the populace to attack the properties of the disloyal nobles.

The rioting persisted two days and, during that time little, if any, effective effort was made by the Government, which, of course, actually meant the King, to suppress the disorders. It certainly did not appear as if Leopold was much disturbed by the outbreak. Anyhow, Count Dietrichstein must have held these views, for he hastened to the King in the most unneutral and ruffled condition: "As I am accredited to the Belgian Government," he enquired bitterly, "may I ask where it is, for I see nothing

but anarchy?" Leopold was far from being upset; he promised that order should soon be restored and added significantly that the outbreak was the natural consequence of the "indignation nationale." Sir Robert Adair, the English Minister, had more success in arousing the King from his lethargic condition and no doubt Leopold was now of the opinion that the pro-Orangist nobles had been adequately punished for their insubordination. He may also have been averse to giving the impression to the English Government, through the medium of Adair, that he was incapable of controlling his own subjects. So the King left his Palace and, accompanied by a few attendants, rode out to the scene of the disturbances. His appearance instantly calmed the excited people and, on his exhorting them to remember their duties as peaceful citizens of Belgium, they dispersed and went home. The Prince de Ligne was naturally immensely embittered by the looting of his house and the complacency of the King, and accused Leopold of having incited the rioting himself. "The ruler of this country is nothing but a standard-bearer of anarchy, a shield for its propaganda," he thundered in a letter to the "Celsissimus," "his kingdom is a nest of intrigue and of conspiracy against the peace of Europe." With considerably more truth, Leopold wrote to the Archduke John of Austria: "The modern French say, 'le roi règne, mais il ne doit pas gouverner'; I, in my smaller sphere, think it necessary for him to do both."

Having settled the pro-Orangist nobles, Leopold turned his attention to more peaceful domestic affairs. He wisely courted instant popularity by reducing the taxes to a lower level than they had been under the Dutch and, despite the size of an army of eighty-seven thousand men, which Leopold considered to be far too large for a small country like Belgium, he managed to balance his budget. He also spared himself no pains to increase the commercial prosperity of his people and, in 1836, received a welcome and unexpected bouquet from an old Republican deputy, representing Philipville in the Chamber, who admitted disconsolately that "there was too much personal prosperity and comfort in Belgium to offer any hope of a new revolution."

The political situation at that time was, however, by no means easy to handle. The Catholic and Liberal politicians, who had combined to create the Belgian State, still adhered to a nominal alliance, but the position was complicated by the emergence of a new trend in Catholic political thought, directly influenced by the teaching of Lamennais. This Breton priest (1782-1854), who started his career as a violent ultramontane, later became the unbalanced advocate of theocratic democracy. Despite a personal visit to Pope Gregory XVI, Lamennais' views were condemned by an Encyclical in 1832. His most famous work, *Paroles d'un croyant*, published two years later, marked his final severance from the Church. In later life Lamennais lapsed into Communism, refused on his death-bed to be reconciled to religion and, according to his own directions, he was buried without funeral rites at Père la Chaise.

This radical section of the Catholics, founded on the doctrines of Lamennais, caused the King considerable trouble, particularly as it was led by young and able priests, who were directly encouraged by the Bishops of Tournai and Ghent. These prelates desired to weaken the central authority of the King, in the belief that their personal influence over the people was sufficient to maintain order. "On that ground," wrote Leopold to Metternich, "they want to make our very advanced constitution even more Liberal, in order to place all power in the hands of Parliament." Metternich was naturally angry and alarmed at the dangerous presumption of this school of thought and wrote to the King castigating Lamennais as an "ambitious fool," who "wanted to use Belgium as the fulcrum of his anti-social revolutionary lever." The very idea of a Catholic not being a monarchist, being in fact too liberal even to support such a democratic throne as that of Leopold, appeared as incomprehensible as it was detestable to the "Celsissimus."

Realising that Metternich strongly sympathised with him in these political-ecclesiastical difficulties, Leopold begged for his support in securing from the Pope the appointment of a Nuncio who could restrain the advanced section of his Catholic subjects. Metternich hastened to

comply and persuaded Rome to appoint Monsignor Gizzi as Papal Nuncio in Brussels, who was a prelate on whom the "Celsissimus" could rely. In consequence, while Leopold was congratulating himself on having secured as Nuncio a Prince of the Church who would be strong enough to curb the turbulent Bishops of Tournai and Ghent, he was at the same time welcoming to Belgium another Austrian spy. Metternich wrote to Count Dietrichstein and explained the appointment by saying that the presence of Monsignor Gizzi in Brussels was "directed not only against the religious revolutionary movement, but against fanatics of every sort." It is to be feared that poor Leopold was not entirely excluded from the latter category. The activities, however, of the Socialist Catholics in Belgium, were ephemeral and innocuous, and the movement expired with the same swift inevitability which has attended all previous and later efforts to combine in one school of political thought the tenets of Socialism with the doctrines of the Catholic Church.

The King had hardly settled his home affairs on a basis of reasonable security, when the death of his first son in May, 1834, besides damaging the prospects of his dynasty, led to a revival of French ambitions. Leopold, however, was taking no chances with Louis Philippe a second time and arranged that his nephew, Ferdinand the son of his brother Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Kohary should be his heir. The English Government strongly supported this selection, but the birth of a second son, the following year, obviated the necessity of legalising the arrangement.

By 1835, Leopold felt at liberty to expand politically outside the borders of his own Kingdom. The long-desired moment had at last arrived, when with an assured and recognised European position, he could place the fruits of forty-five years of experience and knowledge at the disposition of other less fortunate individuals. The year 1835 is indeed a landmark in nineteenth-century European history; that year, when King Leopold of the Belgians began a campaign of concentrated interference in the affairs of other nations. Meddling in other people's

concerns is certainly a marked early-Victorian trait, but other more intimate reasons existed for that prolific intervention, which alternatively harassed and mollified his royal colleagues for over twenty-five years.

Fundamentally, Leopold was intensely ambitious for personal power ; secondly, like Napoleon, he loved and admired his family and was convinced that its members (with certain painful exceptions) would make the best possible sovereigns that any country could desire. As neither of these two ambitions could be satisfied in Belgium, he eagerly gazed over his frontier, prepared to seize the first opportunity that should arise. He had not long to wait. In 1835 Portugal was in need of a King-Consort, owing to the death in March of that year of the Duke of Leuchtenberg, once an aspirant to the throne of Belgium, and then the husband of Donha Maria da Gloria, the young Queen of Portugal, and daughter of Dom Pedro of Brazil. The Duke had only enjoyed his position for two months before his death and, in consequence, nobody was prepared for the sudden emergency. But neither Leopold nor Louis Philippe wasted any time. The King of the Belgians suggested, as the second husband for Donha Maria, the same nephew Ferdinand of Coburg-Kohary whom he had proposed to make his heir. The King of the French, undeterred by the previous lack of success of the Duke of Nemours to secure a crown, proposed his son again. Without any hesitation Lord Palmerston again forbade the Duke's candidature for a throne ; crushing the aspirations of Louis Philippe was becoming quite a habit with " Pam." The path was now clear for Leopold, while the fact that, on two occasions, he had sent Belgian contingents to Portugal to help the Queen in her struggle against her uncle Dom Miguel, strengthened Leopold's claim to interfere in Portuguese affairs.

Having won a throne for his nephew, the next step was to insure that the youth should be worthy of his crown. Ferdinand therefore was brought to Brussels where he spent a few months under the strict supervision of Leopold and Stockmar. According to the Baron, this visit " made him quite another person," and Ferdinand was then released for the service of the House of Coburg, as King-

Consort of Portugal. The early behaviour, however, of the nephew in Portugal did little credit to Leopold, and it is doubtful whether the transformation act in Brussels was either satisfactory or wise. Vain and good-looking, pompous and rash, the first exploits of Ferdinand would have been more suited to a musical comedy than to a country enfeebled by civil war. Constant revolutions in the capital proved Ferdinand's unpopularity, though his follies can perhaps be somewhat excused by the fact that he was only nineteen, and his wife Donha Maria, who was no more than seventeen at the time of her second marriage, was unluckily an ugly, ambitious and ignorant girl. The King-Consort of Portugal caused Leopold much trouble for several years, but never once did he doubt the eventual success of his experiment and he was supremely happy in the contemplation of another Coburg enjoying a throne.

As Leopold's choice eventually proved a happy one and, since this was his single excursion into Portuguese politics, we will briefly follow the remarkable career of this Prince of Coburg.

In 1847 another violent revolution broke out in Lisbon, which was only crushed with the assistance of English and Spanish troops. Although Donha Maria was afterwards reluctantly compelled to grant a constitution to her people, she avenged herself on the rebellion by sending many of the leaders to a penal colony. For this, she was angrily attacked in the House of Commons, the opportunity to interfere in another nation's affairs being greedily seized by the representatives of English democracy and, when Queen Victoria wrote to apologise, the Portuguese Queen wittily replied that she was not in the least offended by the abuse she had received as she was quite aware that the House of Commons usually met after dinner.

Donha Maria da Gloria died in 1853, at the age of thirty-four, having given birth to eleven children, of whom seven survived her. Her eldest son, who succeeded as Pedro V, was still under age at her death and the King-Consort ruled as Regent for two years. Ferdinand had, by then, somehow undergone a complete transformation; perhaps he had reverted to that former self which Leopold and Stockmar had so successfully crushed twenty years

before ; anyhow, on the death of his wife, Ferdinand found he had become the most popular man in Lisbon. Stiffness and pomposity had melted under the rays of the Portuguese sun, prudence and commonsense had been acquired, although King Ferdinand, like his uncle King Leopold, always held loose views on conjugal life.

The two glorious years of Regency over, Ferdinand hastened to install, in great style, his mistress Elise Hensler in his lovely palace at Cintra. This daughter of a Boston tailor had captivated the King while singing in "Un Ballo in Maschera." With Elise, he spent many joyous years, eventually and indeed tardily marrying her in 1869, when Duke Ernest II made her Countess Edla in the peerage of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. So attached was Ferdinand to Elise that, in 1862, on the abdication of King Otto of Greece, he declined the throne of that country, although his uncle Leopold persistently urged him to accept and was scandalised by his refusal. Afterwards, Leopold made this disedifying confession : " I even went so far as to say that the beauty of Levantine women was known to be great." But Ferdinand preferred the solid charms of his Elise to any nebulous Levantine ladies and his faithfulness to this mistress probably caused him to refuse to be a candidate for the throne of Spain in 1870. Ferdinand, who, in his closing years, made a remarkable collection of censored books, died in 1885, at the age of sixty-nine, from cancer of the face, which had been aggravated by a fall, riding. This enterprising Coburger was the only member of his family to marry an actress, but he was none the less a thoroughly domesticated Prince and even succeeded in teaching his wife Elise to make her own tea-cakes.

Leopold's solitary act of interference in Portuguese affairs, unsatisfactory as it appeared in the beginning, nevertheless whetted his appetite for further political excursions into the Iberian Peninsula. Spain in the 'thirties offered certain opportunities for meddling, although the unfortunate Queen Isabel was still far too young to be married to a Coburg Prince. Otherwise her position strongly resembled that of Donha Maria of Portugal ; both Queens, Isabel represented by her mother Maria

Cristina, fighting the claims of uncles to occupy their respective thrones. Owing to the fact that both Isabel and Maria were supported by their Liberal politicians, although neither of the young sovereigns ever showed the least sign of being liberal-minded, they received the open assistance of England and France and the active sympathy of Leopold. The Carlists and Miguelists, represented the pure doctrines of Absolutism and Legitimatism, which had been violated in their view by the Pragmatic Sanction of King Ferdinand of Spain in favour of his daughter Isabel, and they received the support of Russia, Austria and Prussia.

In 1835 Leopold determined to give concrete proof of his sympathy towards Queen Isabel and encouraged in Belgium the formation of a military unit to fight on her behalf in Spain. Naturally, Metternich was greatly incensed on hearing of the King's project and, on June 20th, instructed Count Dietrichstein to demand his passports if Leopold did not withdraw his sanction of military support for the Cristinos. The "Celsissimus" was indeed deeply agitated: "The enlistment would mean that Belgium was assisting the revolution which has taken refuge in Spain, under the banner of Queen Cristina," he wrote to the Count in Brussels; "It would make Belgium an accomplice of revolutionary measures . . . and would end in making the country the arsenal of all the agitators and disturbers of the peace of Europe." This letter not only showed how Metternich distrusted and misunderstood Leopold, but also how the "Celsissimus" was beginning to lose his sense of proportion in European affairs. Nevertheless, the King realised that the game was up, intervention in Spain was neither politic nor possible, and he withdrew his sanction for military interference in the Peninsula.

But in Portugal and Spain Leopold was only improving his technique for the master-stroke of his international career; the marriage of his niece, Princess Victoria to the man of his choice, who naturally had to be of the House of Coburg and who was to be, in fact, his nephew, Francis Charles Augustus Albert Emmanuel, known as Albert, the second son of his brother Duke Ernest I.

Leopold's determination to marry his niece to one of his two nephews, preferably the second, as Ernest, the elder, would one day be the ruler of Coburg, dated from the time that Victoria and Albert were both twelve years old, for the latter's less consequential birthday was also in 1819, that year made famous by the heir-breeding race of English Royal Duchesses.

All through her early years, Leopold had kept a watchful and paternal eye on his English niece and on her increasingly important position. The rumour of 1835, that proved to be false, that Queen Adelaide was with child, must have been most disquietening for him, and although King William said that it was nothing but a good joke, it is unlikely that either Leopold or his sister the Duchess of Kent were much amused. But besides gaining the love and confidence of Victoria, Leopold spared himself no pains to improve her mind and to prepare her for the throne. It would be invidious and untrue to suggest that the King's deep interest in his niece's welfare was solely influenced by political or even family considerations. For nine months, Leopold had been the potential father of the future King or Queen of England and, with the loss of his wife and son he had eagerly transferred his paternal love to his sister's daughter, destined one day to assume the position his still-born child should have enjoyed. In the inmost recesses of his heart, Victoria and England held the deepest and truest part of his affections far more than his own children, Belgium or poor Louise-Marie. On the other hand, it would be idle to deny that Leopold was not dazzled by the alluring prospect of being the predominant uncle of England's future Queen.

When she was fourteen, Leopold treated his niece with some sound but very grown-up advice. He urged her to practise an introspective mode of thought and to cultivate a sense of proportion in life. "Nothing is stronger and clearer evidence of an unfitness for great and high enterprises than a mind that is taken up with trifles," he wrote, "soundness of mind must show itself in distinguishing between the important and the unimportant." That his niece successfully cultivated this essential quality, hard

enough for a woman to learn in that or in any other age, is shown by the life and achievements of Queen Victoria. About the same time Leopold wrote : " History is the most important study for you," and he recommended that she should examine the life of the irresolute and flaccid Queen Anne, in order to avoid her errors. For this purpose, Leopold sent her a memorandum on the life of that Queen. Princess Victoria was much interested and wrote to her uncle saying that now she knew " what a Queen ought not to be, that you will send me what a Queen ought to be." No doubt the King hastened to comply and it shows how attractive Leopold's methods of teaching must have been, that despite its quantity and profundity, the Princess enjoyed it and was, in fact, always asking for more. Indeed, love for her uncle was stimulated by this constant stream of learning and advice and frequently, in her youthful diary, Victoria referred to her " dearest uncle," who had always been " like a father to her," since " from my earliest years . . . the word, uncle, alone, meant no other but you," a statement which obliterated the memory of the " wicked uncles." In one letter the Princess even longed " for the happiness of being able to throw herself into his arms," a mode of expression which Leopold may have considered as being more suitably addressed to a lover than an uncle. Victoria's confidence in Leopold's wisdom was infinite and, when her cousin Prince Ferdinand left for Portugal to become the husband of Donha Maria da Gloria, she wrote ecstatically in her diary : " Ferdinand *must* succeed if he follows Uncle Leopold's advice."

Leopold could therefore regard his position with his niece as highly satisfactory, the fruits of a constant cultivation of her mind and affections, but he had not meanwhile been neglecting the upbringing of his nephew Albert, whose proper education was equally essential to the fruition of his happy design.

This Prince, whose virtuous life is as widely known as it is rarely imitated, committed at the beginning of his career, the only error of judgment in his life ; he was born two months after and not before his cousin Victoria—to be exact, on August 26th, 1819. Educated, as a child, at Rosenau by Consistorialrat Florschütz, Albert and his

elder brother Ernest then proceeded to Bonn University where Albert devoted himself to natural science, political economy and philosophy, under the guidance of such experts as Fichte and Schlegel. He also learnt music, painted and fenced. His most remarkable attribute at the age of seventeen was, however, his beauty, to which Leopold wisely attached considerable importance. Even the critical and unemotional Stockmar was moved by the handsome Albert : " In external appearance," he wrote unreservedly to Leopold, " he is all that a woman can wish, and that women in all ages and lands do wish." It was indeed courageous of the Baron to speak for the female species of every nation and period.

Greatly encouraged by Stockmar's unstinted praise, Leopold decided in 1836, that the moment had arrived to present Albert to his future bride. Victoria's susceptibilities, however, demanded that the appearance of a family visit should decently disguise the move. So Duke Ernest, accompanied by his two sons Ernest and Albert, were sent over to England to pay a visit to his sister the Duchess of Kent. The fact that the Duchess favoured the visit and was prepared to shelter her daughter's suitors under her own roof, produced in King William symptoms of apoplexy as well as a wild determination to thwart his sister-in-law's schemes. Not content with inviting his own candidate for Princess Victoria's hand, Prince Alexander of Orange, the King even threatened to prevent the Coburgs from landing on his shores. The bristles of the Belgian King rose angrily at this impudence and he wrote as follows to his niece Victoria : " I hope it will a little rouse your spirit. Now that slavery is abolished even in the British Colonies, I do not comprehend why your lot should be, to be kept a little white slave in England." But even King William had the sense to realise that he could not prevent by force, the Duchess of Kent from entertaining her brother and nephews in her own home, so the Coburg troupe was allowed to land. Even so, they were not the only eligible foreigners who arrived in London in the early summer of 1836. The Coburgs had other rivals besides Prince Alexander of Orange. " There seems to be a flood of German Princes pouring over us," complained

the insular Lord Palmerston, "the Duke of Brunswick, the Prince of Solms, two Dukes of Wurtemberg, and the Prince of Reuss-Loebenstein-Gera have all been seized with a sudden desire to see England." Prince George of Cambridge, Victoria's first cousin, was also another suitor for her hand.

But the Coburgs had precedence in the affections of the Duchess of Kent and her daughter, and the admirable first impression made on the susceptible Princess, particularly by Albert, excluded the possibility of any rival's success. "Albert is extremely handsome," Princess Victoria confided to her journal on May 18th. "His hair is about the same colour as mine. His eyes are large and blue, and he has a beautiful nose, a very sweet mouth with fine teeth." The elder brother did not come off so well: "Albert is extremely handsome," she reiterated in a letter to Uncle Leopold, "which Ernest certainly is not," although the critical Princess was bound to admit that he had "an honest and intelligent countenance."

The visit from the Coburg cousins, which lasted three weeks, was the greatest imaginable success and, when the young Princes left on June 10th, Victoria confessed in her journal that she wept bitterly, of which, had Leopold been aware, he would doubtless have approved. As, however, the King was taking no risks, he followed up the visit of his nephews by appearing himself at Claremont in September of the same year, where besides no doubt occasionally touching on Albert's charms, he also gave his niece the benefit of his advice on such varied topics as science, painting and music, the art of governing and the duties of a woman as wife and mother. Shortly after his return to Brussels, Leopold wrote to his niece extolling the delights of matrimony, but with the following melancholy example from the past: "The only happiness poor Charlotte knew was during her short wedded existence." Besides thus keeping in close touch with Victoria, Leopold also kept a firm eye on Albert and, for ten months, indeed, until April, 1837, that Prince was in Brussels under constant avuncular care.

The year 1836 had certainly been a momentous one for the Princess Victoria, her uncle Leopold and her Coburg

cousins, but London society was little stirred by the first of a sequence of events which, in less than ten years' time, were to change entirely its form and habits. In fact, the Hon. Mrs. Norton was a far more interesting and general topic of conversation than the Coburg visit to the future Queen. The injured husband of this attractive lady brought an action that year against Lord Melbourne for "criminal conversations" with his wife. The fact that Mr. Norton lost his case caused universal amazement and, it was then remembered, with some amusement, that a few years previously Lord Melbourne had been tried for "criminal conversations" with the wife of an Irish Dean. That case against his lordship had also failed in a most unexpected manner, but shortly after its close, the Irish Dean became an Irish Bishop.

In the spring of 1837 King William IV began to decline and Leopold, gambling on his early death, despatched Stockmar to Claremont in order to tighten his grip on the future Queen. The temptation to come to England himself was naturally strong, but he had no liking for the garrulous old King at whose table he had once been severely reprimanded. "What are you drinking, Sir?" demanded His Majesty. "Water, Sir," replied the abstemious Leopold. "God damn it, Sir," thundered the King, "why don't you drink wine? I never allow anybody to drink water at *my* table." Apart from the unpleasant taste left in Leopold's mouth, as a result of this boisterous episode, he realised that his presence in England at that critical moment might cause adverse comment in the country and give the impression, as he expressed it in a letter to his niece, that the object of his visit was that of "ruling the realm for purposes of my own."

On June 20th, exactly one month after the Baron's arrival at Claremont, King William died with those surprising last words on his lips: "The Church, the Church." Stockmar was therefore "bien installé" when his charge became Queen of England and for the next fifteen months he played, as an interloping foreign adviser, a remarkable and indeed unique role in the latter annals of English Court life. The actual details of his activities can only be surmised, but as the go-between of the young

Queen and her Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, Stockmar was the prototype of all private secretaries in the Victorian, Edwardian and indeed in the present age. The necessity for such complete reliance on the Baron was certainly as obvious to Victoria as it must have been gratifying to Leopold, for on the first day of her succession, alone, the meticulous journal of the Queen of England recorded four times : "Saw Stockmar."

It was impossible not to envy the Baron his intense satisfaction at becoming, with such little difficulty, the *Deus ex machina* of the Court at Windsor, although it redounded to the credit of his superb technique that Lord Melbourne gratefully accepted his interference as a kindness and even Lord Palmerston later remarked : "I have never but once met a perfectly disinterested man of this kind and that is Stockmar." Certainly, "Pam's" compliment was somewhat inaccurate, but no doubt he would not understand and, indeed, was probably ignorant of the Baron's subtle satisfaction in wielding secret power.

The high opinions held by Melbourne and Palmerston of Stockmar were by no means universally shared. The House of Commons soon began to be agitated about his activities and, eventually Mr. Speaker Abercromby announced that he would be compelled to bring up in the House, at an early date, the matter of Stockmar's position at the Court. Stockmar was quite unmoved at the prospect : "Tell Abercromby," he snorted to a friend, "I shall know how to defend myself." This threat was most successful. For some unexplained reason, the Speaker left the Baron alone.

Besides playing the principal role in the Windsor household, Stockmar also found time, as he had done twenty years before, to describe in his diary the most important persons of the Court. The majority of the members of the Royal Family who had excited his contempt in 1816 were now dead, so the Baron turned with relish to the politicians of the day. Wellington, he described as "blinded by the language of his admirers . . . insufficient mental gifts." Derby he referred to as "a frivolous aristocrat who delights in making mischief." Melbourne

he stigmatised as being "careless and weak." On Palmerston he was more severe: "I think the man has been for some time insane." He even dared to criticise *The Times*: "It is influenced," wrote the Baron, "or bought."

Despite Stockmar's success in England in organising the Queen and her household, Leopold realised that his position must inevitably become compromised owing to public opposition to the management of Victoria's affairs by a foreigner, who was considered, not without reason, to be also, in some measure, a spy. Leopold therefore decided that a visit to Windsor in September of the year of her accession would not be inopportune, although he had been averse to staying with his niece immediately after she had come to the throne. "People might fancy I came to enslave you," he had written to the Queen in June, "while I glory in the contrary."

The September visit to Windsor was a most gratifying success. Public opinion regarded it without misgivings and Leopold was able to increase his influence over his niece who, according to her journal, "looked up to him and loved him as a father." The King even felt his position strong enough to refer to the question of her marriage with Albert, which, owing to the novel preoccupations of being a Queen, had inevitably fallen into the background. Leopold had, in fact, been seriously worried by Victoria's obstinate silence on the subject since her accession and, previous to his visit, had written to her in some alarm: "I beg you again to permit no one, not even your Prime Minister, to speak to you about things which concern you personally, unless you have expressed a wish that they should do so." But now, Leopold was able to return to the subject of his long-cherished desire with disarming confidence and reminded his niece of her letter to him before she became Queen, in which she had written: "There is another 'sujet' I want to mention to you, 'et que j'ai bien à cœur': which is, if you would consult Stockmar with respect to the finishing of Albert's education."

No doubt niece and uncle agreed on a thorough prosecution of this worthy object and, although Leopold

was to experience further difficulties before his great ambition was realised, he was at the moment much elated by his predominating influence over the Queen. During this visit, the main diversion of Victoria and Leopold was riding, and Creevey gives a charming description of the Queen and her cavalcade of twenty courtiers passing through the Castle gateway in Windsor Park : “. . . the King of Belgium, Vic. and the Duchess of Kent in the first row, but the Boss King very gallantly held his horse in a little to let his Queen Niece be first.” Certainly Victoria valued her uncle’s company, for after his return to Belgium she sadly wrote : “How I shall miss your conversation ! How I shall miss your protection out riding !”

Early in the spring of 1838 events of supreme importance to Belgium not only proved that Leopold had over-estimated his political influence with the Queen of England, but for some time damaged the serenity of their personal relations. Ever since the conclusion of the Treaty of November 15th, 1831, King William of Holland had doggedly refused to evacuate two of the Antwerp forts, with the consequence that Leopold had continued to occupy those parts of Limburg and Luxembourg which the treaty had awarded to Holland. King William had also declined to recognise the independence of Belgium in any shape or form. This recalcitrance on the part of the Dutch had been a source of considerable worry to Leopold for some years, but now that the security of his throne and the independence of his country rested on such a firm international basis, it suddenly occurred to the King of Holland that the King of the Belgians had probably come to regard these fertile lands as an inalienable part of his kingdom. By obtusely clinging to these useless forts, in order to propitiate his military prestige (very sore over the question of Antwerp), King William realised that he was sacrificing his legal claim to some of the most desirable lands in the low country. Now he understood why Leopold had complained so little in recent times of his unwarranted retention of the forts of Antwerp. Very vexed with himself for his short-sighted obstinacy, King William accepted on March 14th, 1838, the twenty-four

articles which had been formulated in London, seven years before.

By this simple though delayed action, King William had, without knowing it, won the first point in the last round in his eight-year struggle with the King of the Belgians, the only round he ever won in competition with that astute monarch. But undoubtedly in 1838, Leopold was somewhat *entêté*. The security of his position at home, the strength of his influence in England, and the welcome signs of reluctant admiration shown to Belgium in the absolutist Kingdoms of Austria and Russia, had definitely turned Leopold's head.

As soon as King William had signified his acceptance of the twenty-four articles Leopold, urged on by his Government and people, demanded their revision in the favour of Belgium, offering at the same time to buy those parts of Limburg and Luxembourg which belonged by right to Holland. Then, to stimulate interest in his claims both at home and abroad, he struck a war-like attitude, called out the militia and collected an army of a hundred and sixteen thousand men. At the same time he aroused the Chamber with a somewhat intemperate harangue : " The rights and interests of the country are the sole rules of my policy," he told the deputies ; " they shall be defended with persistency and courage." The illogical position in which he had placed himself was entirely disregarded by Leopold, and he failed to realise that King William had every right to decline his offer of repurchase of lands settled on Holland by an international treaty.

Satisfied with his preliminary gestures, Leopold then turned with assurance to his niece Victoria and, foreseeing that Melbourne might make difficulties, he wrote to her expressing the hope that she would inform her Ministers that, " she did not wish her Government to take the lead in any measures which must in a short time lead to the destruction of this land (Belgium) and of her uncle and his family." Leopold was, of course, grossly exaggerating the position, since the King of Holland had no further designs on the rights of Belgium, other than those granted him in the twenty-four articles, to which Leopold had originally agreed.

In thus overstating his case, Leopold not only raised some justifiable suspicions in the mind of his niece, but also infuriated the Powers by his high-handed and truculent behaviour. The English Government was particularly annoyed that the King of the Belgians should attempt, by his position as uncle to the Queen, to upset a treaty actually signed in London, and Victoria was reluctantly compelled to inform her uncle that, as the treaty was signed by all the Powers and therefore binding : "It is almost impossible to consider it as otherwise and to set aside those parts of it which have been ratified by all the parties."

Leopold was stunned by the quiet firmness of this reply, which accurately echoed European opinion, and he was further disconcerted by the attitude of Louis Philippe, on on whom he had as well relied for support. But the King of the French also refused to assist Leopold in his claims on Holland, being by no means averse to humbling his son-in-law, whose independent behaviour towards France had falsified all his hopes of securing a predominant position in Belgium through the marriage of Leopold to his daughter Louise-Marie. Incidentally, the English and French Governments, acutely at variance in the East, were delighted to discover that they could agree in the West by jointly humiliating the King of the Belgians ; a paradoxical situation which gave much malicious satisfaction to the King of the French. Even Lord Palmerston, after some deliberation, had resisted the temptation of supporting Leopold in his mischievous pretensions and, after he had informed the Prussian Minister, whose King was naturally anxious on behalf of his Dutch relations, that he and the English Government were adamant in their strict adherence to the twenty-four articles, the King of the Belgians found himself abandoned by all the Great Powers. Leopold was inevitably greatly embittered by this unanimous opposition to his unfortunate *démarche*, and wrote peevishly to Victoria : "I thought I had been put aside, as one does with a piece of furniture, which is no longer wanted." But the Queen, though all sweetness, remained unmoved.

The alarming and isolated position in which Leopold had placed his country in the early spring of 1838 was further accentuated by the so-called "Skrzynecki" affair, which completed his political humiliation. The Belgian army was always in need of superior officers with war experience, the debacle of 1831 having brought them little knowledge of active service, other than that provided by a rapid and ignominious defeat, and Leopold, in order to complete his war-like preparations, decided to offer the Polish General Skrzynecki the command of the Belgian army. Unfortunately, this officer was excessively unpopular on the continent. He had played an important and, at first, successful part in the Polish rebellion of 1830, but after the fall of Warsaw, in the following year, he had unwisely sought refuge in Vienna. Here he was treated as a virtual prisoner by the indignant Metternich and his repeated requests to be permitted to go to France or England had always been refused. It is easy therefore to imagine the fury of the "Celsissimus" when he learnt that this highly suspect General had, on the direct invitation of the King of the Belgians, attempted a secret flight from Prague to Brussels. An admirable opportunity for the exemplary punishment of Leopold's "Revolutionary Throne" was thus offered to the Absolutist Powers and, on February 5th, 1839, the Austrian Envoy, Count Rechberg and the Prussian Envoy, Count Seckendorff, after delivering a short ultimatum, demanded their passports and left Brussels for their respective countries.

Leopold's humiliation was now complete and, for a time, owing to her King's hasty and unwarranted behaviour, Belgium stood isolated in Europe, surrounded by hostile or sardonic states. Had King William of Holland possessed the necessary ability to make full use of Leopold's diplomatic defeat and the universal distrust he had aroused, he might have successfully urged on the Powers a reconsideration of the status of Belgium with a view to returning to the conditions set up by the treaty of 1815. But King William was content with the fulfilment of the twenty-four articles, to which in April the King of the Belgians was forced hastily to agree, and thus the House of Orange lost its last opportunity for revenge on Leopold of Saxe-

Coburg, for the mortifications and defeats of over twenty years.

Leopold gave vent to his feelings of indignation at his signal discomfiture in a series of bitter letters, many of which were addressed to Queen Victoria. In one of these, he expressed the opinion that, owing to the disillusion his country had suffered, for which England was, as ringleader, largely to blame, he anticipated that he would be the first and last King of the Belgians and that if he were to abdicate it would be "very awkward" for England and "deservedly so." But Victoria refused to be drawn by Leopold's petty inferences and, in a letter on April 30th, told him that she declined further to discuss the Belgian situation, deeply regretting that on this one point she could not agree with her "dear Uncle."

With Metternich, Leopold wisely adopted a less peevish attitude, and in fact, wrote a brilliant defence of his actions. In February, after withdrawing the Austrian Envoy, the "Celsissimus" had written an adamant letter to the King, pointing out that an end must be put to the general belief that Austria, as a conservative Power, would not venture to oppose Catholic Belgium, and concluding with the sinister words: "If Belgium resists, it confronts the fate which befalls all enterprises which make an ally of revolution." To this obvious hint that Metternich no longer regarded the prolonged independence of Belgium as inevitable, Leopold made the following skilful reply: "I had quite got rid of the anarchist crowd, and the monarchic principle had made great progress, much greater than in France, when the ruthless and careless decisions of the Conference came to revive all sorts of violent passions. The feeling of our people, who have been given to Holland, is much the same as the feeling would be if part of Austria were awarded to Bavaria. The Province was too long with us, precisely owing to the action of King William, for it to be possible to pacify several hundred thousand men by force alone. My position is very hard and unenviable, and I am making new and painful sacrifices for the peace of Europe by accepting the decisions of the Powers, and inducing my country to do so. It would be dangerous to the country not to accept, but

it might be just as dangerous for the Powers, and a violent enforcement of them might have consequences which are not to be ignored. My view, as known to Your Excellency, is unchanged : every great European crisis will do more for the democratic than for the monarchical principle." Despite the querulous note at the beginning of this extract and the special pleading which follows, the last sentence was both profound and prophetic, as Metternich learnt to his cost in the Year of Revolutions, and as even more exalted persons than the "Celsissimus" have learnt in the present century.

Leopold's calamitous political activities had, however, not only gravely weakened his international position, but had also produced a coolness between the King and his niece Victoria, which threatened to wreck his darling scheme of marrying the Queen of England to his nephew Prince Albert. Indeed, he was greatly worried by the news he received from the Duchess of Kent, in England, for it appeared that Victoria had recently become regretably independent in personal as well as in political affairs. She was rumoured to have said in a conversation with Lord Melbourne, regarding marriage, that : "In such matters it was necessary to decide for oneself," and also that, "she wished to remain as she was for some time." Leopold also knew that her Prime Minister, Melbourne, on whose opinion she relied implicitly, was by no means enthusiastic about Albert as a possible husband for the Queen and, although fortunately, he was not pushing any candidate of his own, he was said to be impressing on Victoria the unpopularity of the Coburgs abroad, and dwelling on the inevitable English suspicion of any foreigner who contrived to become the husband of their Queen. How Leopold wished that the invaluable Stockmar was still at Windsor and not engaged on improving Albert's mind in foreign parts ; but even the gifted Baron could not be in two places at once.

Other considerations also served to increase Leopold's alarm. The young Queen was obviously headstrong, bitterly opposed to the Tory party, and therefore in wide circles undergoing a spell of not unmerited unpopularity. Her reference to the Duke of Wellington as that "old

rebel " had not gone down too well, while the shabby treatment she allowed to be given to Lady Flora Hastings, who (a spinster) had been erroneously supposed to be with child, had increased public indignation against her. But the famous so-called "Bed-Chamber Plot" had been the most serious incident of all when, contrary to well-established custom, the Queen declined to consider having her Whig ladies changed for Tory ones, should Sir Robert Peel succeed in forming a Government. Although Leopold on this occasion, swayed by motives of discretion rather than of conviction, wrote reassuring her, "I approve very highly of the whole mode in which you have proceeded," it did not prevent the young Queen from being hissed in the Enclosure at Ascot.

Leopold was naturally much disturbed by the ill-advised and rash behaviour of his niece, which was obviously detrimental to her interests as well as to his own, and he realised that a supreme effort must be made to bring about the marriage of the Queen and Albert with the least possible delay. Her Hanoverian blood, Leopold observed with horror, was definitely in the ascendent; unwelcome visions of her insufferable uncle, the Regent, of that inconsequent old King William, and even of her father, the Duke of Kent, according to Greville, "the greatest rascal that ever went unhung," floated through the agitated brain of "Uncle Leopold."

Meanwhile, Prince Albert was in Italy, whither he had been escorted by Stockmar, after leaving Bonn University towards the end of 1838. The Baron had written earlier to "his gracious master," acquainting him with his opinions on the proposed marriage: "If this (the difficulties as the husband of the Queen of England) does not terrify him, then . . . two things require to be thought of. The first is a well-planned education for his future career . . . the second is that he should win the affection of the Princess before he asks her in marriage, and that his suit should be founded only on this sentiment." This humbugging letter, little calculated to impress a realist like Leopold, presupposed the impossibility that Albert would ask the Queen to marry him, an inconceivable presumption on the part of the Prince.

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The reports furnished by Stockmar to Leopold during the Italian journey were by no means uniformly satisfactory, particularly as regards Albert's attitude towards the opposite sex. On one occasion the Baron wrote: "He is too little *empressé* with women, too indifferent, too reserved." This instructive account of Albert's lack of interest in women, a characteristic which incidentally remained with him all his life, was not atoned for by the fulfilment of the pious educational hopes entertained at the beginning of the tour. Stockmar was compelled to report that his charge took no interest in politics and never read a newspaper and, "full of the best intention and noblest designs, he often fails in carrying them into practice." The Baron, however, must have been proud of his pupil in Rome when Albert informed the startled Pope that Greek art was not derived from the Etruscan civilisation as His Holiness imagined, but from the Egyptian.

Actually Albert did not relish being in Italy, for unlike Leopold he was never happy abroad, as his uneasy life in England was later to prove. He had none of his uncle's international outlook and no vestige of the eighteenth-century love of foreign travel, so fully possessed by Leopold. Coburg remained always his spiritual home, where he could play on his organ, "a noble instrument," which "brought all heaven before his eyes." But although Albert derived little benefit from his travels in Italy, it was during this tour that Stockmar acquired that unchallenged sovereignty over his pupil's mind. "Never relax," Stockmar imprinted on Albert's mind as the French had engraved "Calais," on Mary Tudor's heart.

The foundation of this exquisite mastery which Stockmar won over Albert remains a mystery. But it is unlikely that this almost terrifying power, acquired by the Baron, can have been entirely based on motives of respect on the part of the younger for the older man, nor on a mutual sense of duty towards the House of Coburg. Both men were curiously immune from the physical control of women and, although a parallel between Stockmar and Albert on the one hand, and James I and Buckingham on the other, would be exaggerated and misleading, it is not

inconceivable that their fundamental ground of contact was unconsciously founded on sex.

Their wearisome journey over, Albert and the Baron returned to Coburg, to the former's intense relief. But the respite was short, for Leopold now regarded his nephew as being "finished" enough to present to his future wife. Victoria, however, was far from desiring another visit from her cousins in Coburg. "I said (to Melbourne)," she wrote in her journal in July, 1839, "that it was disagreeable for me to see him and a disagreeable thing." She also wrote in the same month to Leopold regarding her possible marriage with Albert : ". . . any such event could not take place till two or three years hence . . . I may like him as a friend and as a cousin and as a brother, but not more. . . ."

Leopold was horrified by the contents of this letter. In two or three years' time his niece might have irrevocably prejudiced her position as Queen of England, or again she might have married someone else, an even more enraging prospect. This most unwelcome letter made Leopold realise more strongly than ever the essential importance of Albert presenting himself at Windsor with the minimum of delay. He relied entirely on the beauty of his nephew's person to overcome his niece's alarming point of view. He was not to be disappointed in this natural and pious hope.

Albert, accompanied as before by his brother Ernest, a necessary protection for Victoria's modesty, arrived at Windsor on October 10th. The same day the Queen wrote in her journal ; "It was with some emotion that I beheld Albert—who really *is beautiful*." The next day she wrote in even more enthusiastic terms of her cousin : "Albert really is quite charming, and so excessively handsome—such beautiful blue eyes, an exquisite nose, and such a pretty mouth, with delicate moustachios, and slight, but very slight, whiskers : a beautiful figure, broad in the shoulders, and a fine waist." The Hanoverian outlook is conspicuous in that sensual description of a desirable man. On October 12th, Victoria wrote to her uncle : "Albert's beauty is most striking, and he is so amiable and unaffected," restrained but comforting words ;

for, as Leopold had anticipated, his niece had immediately fallen on again seeing her magnificent cousin, and all her prim objections to matrimony, carefully fostered by Melbourne, had been scattered to the winds, once faced by physical desire.

On October 14th, the Queen proposed and was inevitably accepted by the blushing Albert. The next day Leopold received from Victoria one of the most gratifying letters of his life : " My mind is quite made up—and I told Albert this morning of it . . . loving Albert as I do, I cannot wish it (the marriage) should be delayed." The King's answer was more composed than his feelings when he wrote to the Queen that " nothing could have given him more pleasure than that news," for actually he was radiant with triumph at this brilliant fulfilment of his most cherished desire which, he knew, would richly compensate him in the future for the many failures and humiliations of the past.

Leopold would have been hardly human and certainly untrue to his own character if he had not regarded the alliance of his nephew and niece from the standpoint of his own increased personal and international prestige, but he could not possibly have envisaged the remarkable and unforeseen effects of this union on the people of the British Isles. Leopold would indeed have been an ambitious oracle had he predicted that, in less than ten years after their marriage, a young man and woman, both in their early twenties, would have succeeded by example and determination in revolutionising the life and morals of English Society. And the initial credit for this unique achievement must be given to the First King of the Belgians.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“ Force is the basis of political order and the maintenance of States.”

LEOPOLD

LEOPOLD was still sunning himself in the blissful contemplation of Victoria and Albert's wedding when the arrival of an acute crisis in the Ottoman Empire threatened to plunge Europe into war. The details of the successful revolt of the Egyptian Viceroy, Mehemed Ali, against the Sultan Mahmud, belongs to Near Eastern rather than to Western history, but the repercussions in Europe caused the greatest alarm to the King of the Belgians, who always realised that, in the event of a general European conflict, his country would almost inevitably furnish a convenient battle-ground, while the independence of Belgium, whatever the outcome, might again be jeopardised.

In June, 1839, the complete defeat of the Sultan's forces at Nisib placed Egypt and Syria at the mercy of the rebellious Mehemed Ali and the new Sultan Abdul Mejid, a boy of sixteen, realising his impotence to reconquer the lost provinces, placed himself unreservedly in the hands of the Great Powers. He did not underestimate their greed for Turkish territory, but he gambled on their mutual jealousy to maintain the *status quo*. In this expectancy he was not disappointed. On the recognised principle of the Sultan's "Legitimacy," Russia, Austria, Prussia and England assured Turkey of their support in the struggle against Mehemed Ali. To the general consternation of the powers, however, the King of the French openly declared his approval of the rebellion.

The fundamental reasons for this awkward and brazen attitude adopted by Louis Philippe could be explained by the recent history of France. Ever since 1815 that country

had been suffering from an inferiority complex. The return of the Bourbons had been manipulated and their position secured by the authority of England and the Holy Alliance while, in foreign affairs, France had been purposely treated as a second-rate power. With the fall of Charles X, however, who had been King of France by the grace of God and the conquerors of Napoleon, the position was entirely changed. Louis Philippe, the bourgeois King of the French, ruled by the grace of the people and, from the time of his accession, he had been eagerly searching for an occasion to show his country, by an ambitious and successful foreign policy, that France was no longer the tool of the Holy Alliance. In 1830 he had tried with Belgium, but owing to Leopold and Palmerston, he had failed. The Turkish imbroglio now seemed to Louis Philippe to offer a most favourable opportunity of asserting his independence in Europe and also of strengthening his position in France by an impetuous and truculent foreign policy; a sure means of gaining popularity for any ruler with the vain and ambitious French. His support of Mehemed Ali opened out as well, the alluring prospect of a future domination of the African shore of the Mediterranean by France, and also might serve to divert French and foreign eyes from the then unsuccessful operations around Algiers.

As soon as Leopold was aware of the attitude adopted by his father-in-law, he hastened to offer his mediation between France and the other powers, with the active support of Metternich, with whom he had had a meeting in Wiesbaden late in October, 1839, for the "Celsissimus" had not been slow in making use of Leopold's increased European prestige as a result of the English Royal wedding. But Louis Philippe declined the proffered mediation of his son-in-law and, by appointing Thiers, the prime mover of France's new orientation in foreign affairs, to the head of the Ministry in March, 1840, openly and unreservedly proclaimed his support of Mehemed Ali. At the same time, French public opinion was worked up to a high fever of expectation by the Government, and wild claims were revived regarding the Rhine frontier.

Louis Philippe's warlike gesture, however, was futile in

the face of a solid and antagonistic Europe, while Palmerston was, of course, delighted at the French King's policy of self-imposed isolation and immediately took the opportunity of demanding assurances from the French Government regarding their naval preparations, a well-known manœuvre in English foreign policy. Leopold, however, who cordially disliked "Pam" for the humiliations of 1838, wrote to Metternich in March, 1840, stating that England was adopting too bitter and violent an attitude against France for desiring to acquire influence in Egypt. ". . . They are really frivolous in their behaviour to France and I ask Your Excellency's aid . . . hitherto all the gain has been on the side of England ; France was not suffered to annex anything. One cannot say this pleased the ardent section of the French nation. . . French vanity cannot be wounded indefinitely with impunity. 'Un beau matin' we shall see something that we do not like." Leopold realised that *beau matin* would be a grim one for Belgium.

The "Celsissimus" was naturally beside himself with rage at Louis Philippe's blow at the sacred principle of "legitimacy," by supporting the Egyptian rebel. "France is a lost land," he thundered in a letter to Leopold in April, and added, as a prudent after-thought, "(as far as lands can be) and a ceaseless source of misfortune for the whole of Europe." Louise-Marie, however, for once aroused out of her political reticence by an engrained and healthy hatred of the English, came valiantly to her father's side. Late in the previous year, a meeting between Victoria and Louis Philippe, arranged to take place at Brighton, had been abandoned owing to the crisis in the Near East, and the Queen of the Belgians wrote angrily to her mother : "Il faudrait tenir la dragée haute à ces misérables anglais qui nous chicanent toujours si insolument de mille manières." The thought of Lord Palmerston enraged Louise-Marie even more than his countrymen for, when she and Leopold were in London in the early part of the following year she wrote to the Queen of the French : "On ne se fait pas de la légèreté et de l'entêtement de la vanité de Palmerston."

But Louise-Marie's loyal support of her father availed

him little. A quadruple alliance, the work of Palmerston, was formed of England, Russia, Austria and Prussia to maintain the *status quo* in Turkey and to eject Mehemed Ali from Syria. This alliance completed the humiliation of Louis Philippe, whose subjects exploded into impotent rage on realising their isolation in Europe and the utter ruin of their King's ambitious schemes. Palmerston, who had been chiefly responsible, cleverly diverted the blame for this diplomatic defeat of the French on to the shoulders of Prussia and, although his uncompromising opposition to Mehemed Ali was attributed by his inimical contemporaries to a brutal desire to humble France, it was to a much greater extent based on a brilliant premonition that the possession of Egypt would one day be essential for the security of the British Empire. When that day should arrive it was clearly preferable that Egypt should be in the decrepit power of the Sublime Porte rather than under the virile domination of a new dynasty of bellicose Pashas.

Palmerston, however, had not been content with a bloodless victory over the French-Egyptian alliance, for the British, supported by their Allies, bombarded Beyrouth and invested Alexandria. This proof of the earnestness of his adversaries' intentions and the realisation that the French Government was only able to provide him with diplomatic support induced in Mehemed Ali a welcome disposition to enter into negotiations with the Powers. At the same time Louis Philippe, seeing that the rebel Viceroy was weakening, abandoned warlike preparations, dismissed Thiers, the evil genius of the Near Eastern experiment, and replaced him by Guizot, hitherto French Ambassador in London, in order to prove his desire for a peaceful solution of the Egyptian question.

The moment now appeared propitious to Leopold to attempt mediation on behalf of his father-in-law and to discover a formula of agreement which should not be too mortifying for Louis Philippe and his people to accept. He therefore adopted Metternich's proposal, "Egypt for Mehemed Ali, Syria for the Sultan," an arrangement that would demonstrate to Louis Philippe that his support of the Viceroy had at least secured for him half of his exten-

sive conquests. This solution, Leopold urged with persistence on Queen Victoria, who agreed with him that the French should be let down lightly, but Palmerston still desired a greater humiliation for the King of the French, and the capture of St. Jean d'Acre by English and Austrian marines led him to believe that Mehemed Ali could now be completely crushed and the Sultan reinstated in all his lost dominions.

Leopold was naturally most embittered at the prospect of his endeavours for peace being callously ruined by Palmerston's intransigent attitude, which he described as unparalleled folly, but the tenacity and moderation of Queen Victoria—Albert had hardly begun to count outside domestic circles—eventually persuaded even Palmerston that Louis Philippe had adequately expiated his diplomatic blunder and could now be received back into the fold of the Great Powers. In consequence, on July 13th, 1841, the five united Powers, England, Austria, Russia, Prussia and France signed the Dardanelles Treaty, which ; besides closing the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles to all foreign battleships, conceded to Mehemed Ali the hereditary Vice-royalty of Egypt and Nubia, and gave Syria back to the Sublime Porte. Thus, after multitudinous difficulties, chiefly caused by the inordinate pride of Louis Philippe and Palmerston, Europe avoided the peril of a general war, for which achievement much credit must be given to Leopold for his by no means disinterested love of peace.

For the next few years both the King of the Belgians and his nephew and niece in England were able to turn their attention to internal and personal affairs. In Belgium, the autumn witnessed a futile and the last pro-Orange plot against Leopold. Arms and ammunition were discovered in the Tivoli public gardens, in the vicinity of Laeken, and it was disclosed that the rebels intended, on the King's overthrow, to set up a republican form of government until Belgium could be re-united with Holland. Leopold was convinced that the Dutch King was indirectly concerned in the proposed rebellion. Nevertheless, on November 5th, of the following year, a convention was signed between Holland and Belgium

which finally brought to a conclusion the bitter differences of a whole decade.

In political affairs, the alliance of the Catholic and Liberal parties, which had been formed to secure and stabilise Belgian independence, was dissolved, although their only important divergence of opinion was, that the Catholics wished their children to be educated by the clergy, while the Liberals were in favour of secular education. Belgium therefore returned to the agreeable pastime of party politics although, in 1842 M. Charles Nothomb formed his so-called neutral ministry, which lasted until 1845. Such insignificant party adjustments, the best diversion that the Belgians could provide for their indefatigable King, aroused Leopold's secret scorn. In October, 1840, he wrote to Queen Victoria from Brussels : " I am, in fact, bored with being here," and again later : " Here one is shut up as if one was in a menagerie, walking round and round like a tame bear. . . . I wish I could have a *chassez-croisez* with Otto (the Wittelsbach King of Greece) . . . the more so as you do not any longer want me in the West." (A somewhat jealous allusion to Albert's growing political influence over the Queen.) Presumably Victoria must have mentioned her uncle's unsettled condition to her Prime Minister, for a little later, Lord Melbourne wrote to her with some irritation : " The King Leopold . . . still hankers after Greece ; but crowns will not bear to be chopped and changed about in this manner." But if Leopold was unable to satisfy his playful notion of a *chassez-croisez* with King Otto of Greece, he was able actively to intervene in English politics in 1841.

Lord Melbourne's Whig Government which, contrary to Leopold's repeated advice, received the practically open support of the Queen, was in that year obviously liable to fall, owing to the deplorable financial and commercial conditions in the country. A General Election seemed imminent, from which Victoria hoped her beloved Prime Minister would emerge triumphant. Leopold, who was most anxious that Melbourne should fall, not only owing to his personal influence over the Queen, which militated against his own, but also on account of the presence of the hated Palmerston in his Cabinet, feared that his

niece's optimistic hopes of a Whig victory might be realised. He therefore wrote to the Queen strongly advising her to form a moderate Conservative Ministry rather than to risk the hazardous course of a dissolution. The Queen, however, rejected her uncle's advice, and Leopold expressed to Count Dietrichstein some pungent opinions on English politics. "Yes, the retiring Whig Cabinet is guilty of a crime," said the King, according to a report of a conversation forwarded by the Count to the "Celsissimus." "It is committing an infamy! The dissolution of Parliament will endanger the entire future of the Queen. . . ." Actually Leopold must have realised that he was talking nonsense, since the return of Melbourne to power would certainly not have been followed by such catastrophic results, although, no doubt, it was time that the Queen should give her confidence to other advisers. But Leopold was swayed in his hasty judgment by his personal dislike of Palmerston, his fear of Melbourne's authority over his niece, and his wounded vanity, caused by her increasing rejection of his uncalled-for advice.

The King's fears, however, of the Whigs returning to office were not realised, for Sir Robert Peel won an unexpected victory at the polls. Leopold was radiant and indulgently patted our incalculable electorate on the head. "There is a sort of providence in the solution," he said to Count Dietrichstein. . . . "The English are not so easily excited (in comparison with the French). It takes time for the poison (presumably liberal principles) to work on these powerfully organised and not very impressionable natures."

Despite his relief at the Tory victory, for, politics apart, Peel, the new Prime Minister, was a personal friend, and Aberdeen was a welcome change as Foreign Secretary in the place of Palmerston, Leopold still felt indignant at his niece's mistaken policy of openly favouring the Whigs. "The Queen made a great mistake," he confided to the Austrian Envoy, "and her advisers committed a political crime in representing their ruler as a jealous partisan, the supreme head of their party." In contrast to Leopold's impertinent and misguided advice to the Queen regarding the wisdom of dissolving parliament, his strictures on her

partial attitude towards the rival parties were entirely justified, while Stockmar, in a memorandum in October, 1841, severely criticised her unfair and clandestine correspondence with Melbourne after Peel had become her Prime Minister. He wrote: "I hold this secret interchange an essential injustice to Sir Robert's present position." Undoubtedly the Queen was fully aware of her uncle's disapproval, and she must have shown her resentment in her correspondence with him, for in May of the same year he answered her: "You may pull Albertus by the ear, when so inclined, but be never irritated against your uncle." This bantering, if slightly superior, attitude clearly showed that the King felt reassured of his ascendancy over the Queen, and imagined that he had regained that dominant position in her affairs which he had so nearly lost in 1839, that dreadful year of failure and shame.

Apart from this stimulating and direct interference in English politics, Leopold was also compensated for the boredom of Belgium by being kept closely in touch with current affairs through the presence of Stockmar, who had arrived at Windsor in January 1840, to pave the way for Prince Albert. Almost coincident with his arrival, occurred that remarkable duel of which the Queen of England was the bone of contention. In an after-dinner speech at Canterbury, famous as the "Canterbury Victorippick," the republican Bradshaw had roundly abused Victoria and in consequence was challenged to a duel by Mr. Horsman, the member for Cockermouth. The challenge was accepted, a few shots were exchanged, after which Bradshaw made a stingy apology for his insults to the Queen.

Shortly after his arrival, and before the actual marriage, the Baron had to report to "his most Gracious Master" a most regrettable incident. A combination of Tories and Radicals, led by Sir Robert Peel, had presumed to reduce Albert's proposed annuity, as husband of the Queen of England, from fifty to thirty thousand pounds. Victoria and Leopold were much embittered by this petty insult to the House of Coburg, and the Baron deeply deplored his impotence to prevent it, but when Albert heard the

news he replied in the heroic manner that what most pained him was the restriction that a smaller allowance would impose on his endeavours to do good.

Stockmar was more fortunate in his next intervention on Albert's behalf. The question of the Prince Consort's precedence was even more acrimoniously debated than that of his annuity, but on Stockmar's suggestion it was eventually taken out of Parliament's hands and settled by a Royal Patent, although the Regency Bill, conferring on the Prince Consort sole power over his child in the event of the Queen's death, had to pass both Houses. The only persistent opposition to this just and necessary measure was encountered in the House of Lords in the person of the extremely jealous and avowedly radical Duke of Sussex. During all these difficult negotiations, the Tory opposition had been solely actuated by mean motives of revenge for the Queen's intolerant behaviour towards them, which even went so far as to allow their party hacks to announce the absurd falsehood that Albert was both a Radical and a Roman Catholic. The Regency Bill, however, passed and Stockmar returned for a brief rest to Coburg, highly satisfied with his delicate work on behalf of his former pupil, which had secured Albert a reasonable income and a good position in England.

But the Prince Consort had other troubles during his first few years in this country besides those made by a factious and critical parliamentary opposition. His elder brother Ernest had shown unwelcome signs of dissipation in Coburg. So Albert wrote to him in 1840 strongly urging the stabilising benefits of matrimony, but added discouraging: "A married couple should be chained to one another." Early the next year he pointed another moral: "I have been reading *Werthers Leiden* with Victoria," he wrote. "Many things in it remind me of the state of your soul." In April he assured Ernest of his commendable discretion. "I keep all your letters and put them in a book with a lock"; probably a necessary precaution. In June Ernest committed, in Albert's opinion, an unpardonable indiscretion; he showed one of his brother's letters to his father. This came to Albert's ears and provoked a harsh reprimand. "In future I shall

write to you only about the weather and leave you to perish in immorality." But two years later Albert was sufficiently mollified as to confide to his elder brother his feelings on the death of his pet bird. He did so in these moving words: "I have lost my bullfinch—it always made me happy when the little bird sang: 'Guter Mond du gehst so still.'"

More pleasant concerns than the misdemeanours of his naughty brother came to occupy Albert's attention late in 1840 for, on November 21st, of that year, the Queen gave birth to the Princess Royal. Neither of the infatuated parents found occasion to regret the sex of their first child, but probably Leopold, slightly vexed by the birth of a girl, emphasised to his niece the importance of fertility in a Queen for, shortly after the child was born, Victoria was coyly writing to her uncle: "I think, dearest Uncle, you cannot *really* wish me to be the 'Mamma d'une nombreuse famille' . . . men never think what a hard task it is for us women to go through this *very often*." Apparently the modest Albert had neglected to tell his wife that the task became less hard with repetition.

The approaching birth of the Queen's first child had, however, produced one rather unexpected consequence. Both parents had considered it to be essential that Stockmar should be present at Windsor for the great event. So dutifully and readily, the Baron arrived and, after the appearance of the Princess Royal, he eagerly assumed control of the Royal nursery. Possibly for once the grasping Stockmar had bitten off more than he could chew, for he wrote somewhat tartly to his son: "The nursery gives me as much trouble as the governing of a kingdom." That the Baron was more adapted to govern the latter rather than the former is understandable, but it is indeed remarkable that he should ever have envisaged the opportunity of governing either.

Stockmar's position at the English Court was now so intimate and unassailable that permanent rooms, which were always ready for his use, were provided for him both at Windsor and at Buckingham Palace. There he would frequently arrive or leave without a word of warning to his royal hosts, and he always refused to wear Court

clothes for fear of catching cold. This affectionate licence, permitted by Victoria and Albert, however creditable to the sagacity of the German Baron, was naturally much resented by the English members of the Court, who were compelled to conform to the most rigid etiquette.

The birth of the Prince of Wales on November 9th, 1841, added to Stockmar's nursery duties and, when the Princess Royal was approximately one year old, the Baron considered the moment opportune for writing a lengthy memorandum on the soundest methods of educating his charges. He ended this disquisition on a lofty note: "The education of the royal children from the very earliest beginning should be thoroughly moral and thoroughly English." If only Stockmar had reversed the words "moral" and "English," no early-Victorian gentleman could possibly have disagreed with him.

The Royal Nurseries, however, did not, by any means entirely absorb the Baron's relentless activities, for shortly after his arrival, he decided to put an end to the ineptitude and confusion in the domestic economy of the Palace. Amongst other absurdities, he discovered that the function of cleaning the inside of the windows belonged to the Lord Chamberlain's department, while for the cleanliness of their exterior the department of Woods and Forests was responsible. He also found that, while the minions of the Lord Steward had to fetch the fuel and lay the fires, the Lord Chamberlain's dependents had to light them. But these complicated problems and their solution paled in significance before the unabashed debauchery which Stockmar found existing in the servants' quarters. According to the indignant Baron, these servants were able "to commit any excess or irregularity" which Stockmar thought hardly surprising, for he added, "if smoking, drinking and other irregularities occur where footmen sleep, ten and twelve in each room, no one can help it." The Baron reasoned soundly and his demand for reform was supported and carried out by the Prince Consort, but not until after the "Boy Jones" had been discovered at 1 a.m., under the sofa in a room adjoining that of Her Majesty the Queen.

Matters, however, of more importance than Stockmar's

views on the proper guidance of the Royal Nurseries and the irregularities of the Palace footmen occupied the attentions of Queen Victoria and her uncle in the early 'forties. A tragic catastrophe befell the Royal Family of France in 1842, which concerned both of them closely. On July 13th of that year, Louis Philippe's eldest son, the popular and attractive Duke of Orleans, affectionately known as "Chartres" in the family circle, his name before his father came to the throne, was thrown out of his carriage and killed at Neuilly, near Paris, owing to the horses running away. Naturally the affectionate and sentimental Louise-Marie was overwhelmed by the violent death of her eldest brother, but Leopold, hurrying off to Paris to console his afflicted father-in-law, envisaged the possibility of further strengthening his position in the Orleans family by timely sympathy and untimely advice. Presumably he regarded the objects of this visit as realised, since he wrote as follows from Paris to the Archduke John of Austria: "A good point is the unity of the family, especially as regards the four surviving brothers. As they have every confidence in me, I hope to be useful. . . ."

On his return to Belgium, the King was immersed in the complicated negotiations of two commercial treaties. He was determined to secure good terms both from France and Germany, but equally resolved to avoid the calamity of a political union with either nation. To force the hands of Austria and Germany, he informed Count Dietrichstein that if he was prevented by them from concluding an equitable commercial agreement with France he might be compelled to meditate a political union with that country. On the other hand, he intimated that, in the event of a war with France, Belgium and Prussia could be regarded as one; ". . . the cathedral at Cologne and the city of Brussels would certainly be common objectives of French covetousness." Eventually, by insinuation and strategy Leopold achieved his twofold design; in 1844 Belgium signed a commercial treaty with the German Zollverein, and two years later Leopold concluded a similar treaty with France, greatly to the advantage of his people.

Amongst his other activities at this time, Leopold brought off a brilliant double marriage between the Houses of

Orleans and Coburg ; in 1840, his niece Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Kohary married the Duke of Nemours, and three years later, her brother Prince August was married to Princess Clémentine of Orleans. These unions not only strengthened his own family position with Louis Philippe but also, by allying the Coburgs with the Orleans, Leopold now compelled Queen Victoria to regard the stability of the latter house from a personal as well as from a political point of view. The two Victorias, the Queen of England and the Duchess of Nemours became devotedly attached to one another, and there hangs in Buckingham Palace a charming picture by Winterhalter entitled "The Cousins" in evidence of this happy friendship.

In England, Victoria was equally busy in the early 'forties. Three visits from foreign rulers were paid to the Queen between 1842 and 1844. The first was from Frederick William of Prussia, who arrived in January of the former year to stand as godfather to the Prince of Wales. The general satisfaction which the King gave by coming to England to sponsor the heir to the throne at his baptism was unluckily marred by the startling suggestion he made to Stockmar that, as the Kingdom of Belgium was certain sooner or later to lose its independence, it would be advisable to incorporate it as soon as possible in the German Confederation. Windsor was horrified at the impiety of the notion, but Leopold's comments on the King of Prussia's amiable suggestion are, for posterity, unfortunately unknown.

The next royal visit to Windsor was also unpropitious for Leopold. The Tsar of Russia arrived in June, 1844, and although he had the good sense, when talking to the Queen, to praise the virtues of the Prince Consort with tears in his eyes, remarking enthusiastically : " C'est impossible de voir un plus joli garçon, il a l'air si noble et si bon," in a long interview with Lord Aberdeen, he was far from complimentary about Albert's uncle who apparently, had greatly incensed the Tsar by continuing to employ, after frequent protests, Polish officers fugitive from Russian justice, in the Belgian army. For this parley with the Foreign Secretary, Nicholas had carefully learnt his part beforehand, which involved considering Leopold's

misdeemeanours purely from the Englishman's quaint point of view. "Nous jugeons la chose, non pas en Empereur, ni en Ministre, mais en gentlemen," announced the Tsar with relish to the surprised Aberdeen. "Est-ce qu'un gentleman peut se conduire ainsi envers un gentleman?" It must have been a difficult task for a nobleman of Lord Aberdeen's calibre to refrain from explaining to his distinguished visitor that the question could hardly arise, since the Tsar being a Russian and the King of the Belgians a German, neither could possibly be a gentleman.

Victoria was most attentive to the Tsar during his visit to her Court and, although with her Whig principles she was at first suspicious of the Russian autocrat, he managed by tact and a handsome person to win the good graces of the Queen. They attended the opera (not in state), "but they recognised us and we were most brilliantly received," Victoria wrote to Leopold. "I had to force the Emperor forward. . . . I was obliged to take him by the hand and make him appear; it was impossible to be better bred or more respectful than he was towards me." Although Nicholas explained to the Queen that being always accustomed to wearing uniform he felt so *gauche en frac*, his hostess was most enthusiastic to Leopold about the Tsar's appearance. "He is certainly a very striking man; still very handsome; his profile is beautiful." Then Nicholas showed such exquisite tact when the royal children were brought into the drawing-room, thereby proving that he was endowed with an innate sensibility which contrasted so pleasantly with his stern expression and, according to Victoria, his uncivilised mind. "Voilà les doux moments de notre vie," he whispered softly to the Queen. In her extensive descriptions to Leopold of Nicholas' visit, Victoria once recorded a common characteristic possessed by both her uncle and the Tsar. "His admiration for beauty is very great," wrote the Queen in all innocence, "and puts me much in mind of you, when he drove out with us, looking out for pretty people." It is to be hoped that the unconscious irony of the Queen's observations did not escape her uncle's notice.

The next visit to Windsor, that paid by the King of the

French and his Queen, Marie Amélie, in October of the same year, was a great consolation to Leopold, who was always most anxious for the security of Belgium to foster good relations between England and France. This visit was actually in return for the one Victoria and Albert paid the French Sovereigns the previous year, when they spent a few days in the early autumn at the Château d'Eu. The Queen had been enchanted with their reception in France and agreeably impressed by the respectable family life of the bourgeois King. On that occasion she had written to her uncle : "I write to you from this dear place, where we are in the midst of this admirable and truly amiable family." The open expression of political opinions was carefully avoided by both Sovereigns and before the meeting, Louise-Marie had written warningly to her mother : "C'est encore plus le père de la famille que le roi, Victoria veut voir." The Queen and the Prince Consort went on from d'Eu to Belgium, where Victoria gave great satisfaction to Louise-Marie by tactfully disclaiming any desire to visit the field of Waterloo. "Elle est parfaitement 'at home' parmi nous," she confided to her mother with pleasure and pride.

For the return visit of Louis Philippe, Victoria had been carefully forearmed with a wealth of instructions, contained in two long letters, from the agitated Louise-Marie, regarding the habits of the French King. Her father, it appeared, had signified his intention of attending the English breakfast, the exertions of which meal he was happily ignorant. His daughter, however, having stayed at Windsor, knew to her cost, and implored Victoria to dispense him of breakfast, impressing on her at the same time, the importance of her father partaking of no more than two meals a day, one of which should include a bowl of chicken broth. While on the subject of eating, the Queen of the Belgians was compelled to make this disarming confession regarding her father : "If I must tell you all the truth, she (Queen Marie Amélie) is afraid also that he will eat too much." The strong hope is also expressed that Victoria will prevent the King from riding on horseback, "for my father is naturally so imprudent and so little accustomed to caution and care." Louise-

Marie, however, imagined that, "your promenades would be either on foot or in carriage."

The standard of comfort demanded by Louis Philippe was apparently low ; a hard bed and a large table being the only necessary requirements in his bedroom, although his daughter had a word of advice for Victoria about the bed : "He generally sleeps on a horse-hair mattress with a plank of wood under it ; but any kind of bed will do, if it is not too soft." The diligent Louise-Marie even remembered to ask the Queen to look after her father's manners : "If by any chance Lord Hardwicke was in waiting during my father's stay, you must kindly put my father in mind to thank him for the famous cheese, which arrived safely and was found very good."

Although Louise-Marie's anxiety for her father's welfare suggests a deep distrust of English ways, which undoubtedly was genuine and possibly justified, her lack of confidence in her father's manner of living might have easily given the erroneous impression that Louis Philippe was a moron. The King of the French, however, made a brilliant success of his visit to Windsor, the first a French King had ever paid to this country, and on his return to Paris, in repayment for the Garter, he sent the Prince of Wales a toy gun.

Before referring to the complicated issue of the "Spanish Marriages," which gave Leopold such a delicious opportunity for "disinterested" interference and gratuitous advice, it is instructive to notice in the early 'forties the admirable relations existing between niece and uncle, which had previously suffered through Leopold's arrogant behaviour in 1838 and his unpalatable counsel in the English governmental crisis, two years later. Political allusions could occasionally be pleasingly laid aside in their frequent correspondence, and time and space found by Leopold to play up to his niece's commendable interest in animals. "Eos," the Prince Consort's favourite greyhound, was accidentally shot by Prince Ferdinand, in February, 1842, although what a greyhound was doing out shooting, remained obscure. Leopold was much concerned by this sad event : "I was extremely sorry to hear the accident which befell dear Eos, a great friend of mine," he wrote to his niece, and added with a rare

example of conscious humour on his part : "I do not understand how your uncle managed it. He ought rather to have shot somebody else of the family." Eos, however, recovered, for in the following month, Victoria was able to write to her uncle : "Dear old Eos is going on most favourably ; they attribute this sudden attack to her over-eating (she steals whenever she can get anything) ; living in too warm rooms and getting too little exercise since she was in London . . . she must be well starved, poor thing, and not allowed to sleep in beds as she generally does."

Shortly before this consoling news about Eos, Leopold had received a gentle rap over the knuckles for forgetting the third anniversary of his niece's wedding day. She wrote to him on the great day itself, February 14th ; "I am only a wee bit distressed at your writing on the 10th and not taking any notice of the dearest happiest day in my life. . . . I doubt whether anybody *ever* did love or respect another as I do my dear Angel." This lapse, however, on her uncle's part was soon forgotten in Victoria's delight in her daughter the Princess Royal and her interest in Leopold's daughter, Charlotte. "We find Pussy amazingly advanced in intellect, but alas ! also in naughtiness," she wrote in September, 1843, "I hold up Charlotte as an example of every virtue, which has its effect, for whenever she is going to be naughty, she says : 'Dear Ma, what does Cousin Charlotte do ?'" In January of the following year, Leopold cut his leg. The Queen was concerned but reproving. "Albert says he remembers well your playing often with a penknife when you talked . . . it is really dangerous."

More dangerous, however, than Leopold's playful habits with a penknife, was the keen desire shown at that time by Albert to cultivate the society of men of intelligence, including artists, and occasionally to invite them to court. Victoria had written anxiously to Leopold and found that their uncle frowned on this unconventional project : ". . . dealings with artists . . . require great prudence," he wrote cautiously, "they are acquainted with all classes of society and for that very reason, dangerous ; they are hardly ever satisfied, and when you have too much to do

with them, you are sure to have *des ennuis*. . . ." The warning voice of Uncle Leopold was hardly necessary to insure that Albert should be deprived of congenial society, since the Queen had already shown her displeasure at the audacious suggestion, for being a woman and also one of little culture, she disliked the company of individuals more intelligent and brilliant than herself. Albert was, however, compensated shortly after, for his lack of sympathetic companionship by the Queen's acquiescence in her husband taking an equal charge with herself in the management of public affairs, so that by 1845 Greville could write of the Prince Consort in his diary: "He is King to all intents and purposes."

About this time, the early part of 1844, Leopold reverted to the past and, after casually referring to the manifold benefits he had bestowed on his niece, which accounted for their harmonious relations at the present time, he could not refrain from making a reference to "the little row which we had in 1838," and added significantly, "and do not now think that I was wrong." In her reply on February 6th, the Queen could conveniently ignore her uncle's remarkably feminine allusion, for during the previous week Albert's father, the Duke Ernest of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, had died. "You must now be the father to us poor bereaved, heartbroken children," began the Queen, forgetting that her uncle had frequently been expected to assume paternal responsibilities before. "God has heavily afflicted us," she continued, "we feel crushed, overwhelmed, bowed down by the loss of one so deservedly loved, I may say adored by his children and family . . .," fortunately even Victoria refrained from including his wife in the adoring circle, that convenient heiress who had brought Gotha to the Coburgs and who was rewarded by faithless and harsh conduct on her husband's part. But all the Duke's transgressions were forgotten in the roseate dawn of the Victorian Age.

"I have never known real grief till now," went on the Queen, conveniently forgetting the death of Uncle Clarence, seven years before. "A father is such a near relation," remarked Victoria with a glimpse of the obvious. "You are a piece of him in fact—and all (as my poor

deeply afflicted Angel says) the earliest pleasures of your life were given you by a dear father," a generalisation which certainly did not apply to Albert, whose home was permanently disrupted when he was seven. But the Queen's effusion to her uncle was by no means over: "Indeed, one loves to cling to one's grief," she added, keenly enjoying the luxury of sorrow. The next paragraph of her letter contained an impassioned request to Leopold to allow Louise-Marie to come to Windsor in order to support her during Albert's enforced absence for the funeral: "I have never been separated from him even for one night," she confessed rather pathetically and concluded her letter on a reassuring note: "Mamma is calm. . . ." Had Leopold been blessed with a sense of humour, which unfortunately his Creator had omitted to add to the wealth of gifts with which he had endowed him, he would have been gently amused by his niece's violent reactions to the death of a man with whom, although her father-in-law, she was but superficially acquainted, and who had proved a useless father to her beloved Albert and a disturbing influence in the life of her Uncle Leopold.

The King celebrated his niece's twenty-sixth birthday with a highly original present; a picture of his first wife the Princess Charlotte—an aunt who died two years before her birth, and but for whose death, she, Victoria, would never have been born. This quaint and lugubrious gift was accompanied by a long dissertation on the virtues of the dead Princess, which were as sincere as they were incongruous on his niece's birthday: "My gift is Charlotte's portrait," he wrote on that auspicious occasion. ". . . I take this opportunity to repeat that Charlotte was a noble-minded and highly gifted creature." At the end of this letter, Leopold wrote with deep feeling of the woman, who alone in his life of varied experiences with her sex, had ever aroused in his being the intricate emotion of love. "Grant always to that good and generous Charlotte," he begged of his niece Victoria, "who sleeps already with her beautiful little boy so long—an affectionate remembrance, and believe me, she deserves it." Five years before, Leopold had given a singular proof of his enduring attachment to her memory by christening his

daughter, by his second wife, with the name of Charlotte. It was an unconventional, perhaps a unique, gesture of devotion. It was also a little hard on Louise-Marie.

This engaging flow of confidences between the Queen and her uncle was rudely interrupted in 1846 by the climax in the involved international question, known as the "Spanish Marriages," described by Wellington as "all damned stuff," which nevertheless permanently shattered the good relations between Louis Philippe and the English Government. These delicate negotiations and their regrettable outcome were naturally of European rather than of Belgian concern, as was the case with Mehemed Ali's rebellion against the Sublime Porte, and they were furthermore the intimate concern of the Spanish Queen, her sister and her people, a fact that was often forgotten by the rulers and governments of England and France in their intricate intrigues and rancorous communications. But Leopold was also deeply involved in these transactions, which, had they culminated in the manner desired by him and his niece, would have raised another member of the House of Coburg to a foreign throne.

In 1843 Queen Isabel came of age, an event which not only entailed that her mother, the licentious Maria Cristina, ceased to be Regent of Spain, but also opened out for the Courts and Chancelleries of Europe the delightful prospect of finding a husband for the Queen. Leopold, as usual, was first in the field with the bright suggestion that his nephew Leopold, the brother of the King Consort of Portugal, would fill that enviable position with tact and dignity. Victoria and Albert heartily agreed. But the King of the French was by no means disposed to permit any further spread of Coburg Consorts in Europe, particularly as in conformity with traditional French policy, he was determined to play the most important role in Spain. He realised, however, from the outset that it would be impolitic if not impossible to attempt to win the hand of Queen Isabel for one of his sons, and he therefore conceived the astute idea of proposing his son, the Duke of Montpensier, to be the husband of the Queen's sister, the Infanta Luisa Fernanda, at the same

time searching to provide the Queen with an impotent Consort. Despite the obvious improbability of achieving this double purpose, at the early stages of his intrigue, Louis Philippe was favoured by unexpected good fortune, since he found to hand a most suitable young man, Don Francisco de Asis, of the Sicilian Bourbons, Isabel's first cousin, of whom it could be confidently hoped from his uncomplimentary nickname of "Fanny," would be unlikely to provide the Queen with an heir. French pressure in Spain eventually succeeded in securing the reluctant consent of this unfortunate girl of fourteen to the nauseating proposal.

England, however, was determined to prevent this crafty alliance, and she was able to justify her selfish political aim of obstructing French influence in Spain by a convenient exhibition of outraged morals at the suggestion that the Queen should be married to an effeminate creature, whom she naturally abhorred. It is curious, however, in the light of history, to reflect how Europe, and England in particular, overestimated the power of France from 1815 to 1870. No doubt the memory of Napoleon still obsessed many minds, but even if Louis Philippe had not fallen in 1848, it is highly improbable that English interests would have been in the least damaged at any time during the century by the accession to the throne of Spain of the descendants of the Duke of Montpensier.

At the time, however, the matter was considered of paramount importance in England, and every force was mobilised to defeat the ambitions of the French King. Eventually, after interminable correspondence between their respective ministers, Victoria and Louis Philippe came to the personal agreement that the Queen of Spain should not marry any French Prince, and that the Duke of Montpensier should not be affianced to her sister, the Infanta, until Isabel had married and been blessed with children. Victoria, on her part, promised that England would not support the candidature of Leopold of Saxe-Coburg as prospective husband of the Queen of Spain.

This equitable agreement of course, settled nothing as to whom Isabel should actually be married, and did not

for one moment prevent either Leopold and Victoria or Louis Philippe from pressing the claims of their respective candidates on the attention of the Spanish Queen and her advisers. Although both the Queen of England and her uncle later claimed to have observed strict neutrality after the bargain with the King of the French, the fact that Stockmar referred to Prince Leopold in a letter as "our candidate," and as being "more acceptable" than his rivals, clearly showed that the Coburgs were still working for the success of the Prince. King Leopold was even yet immensely thrilled by the now unlikely prospect of his nephew becoming King-Consort of Spain, but his awkward position as son-in-law to Louis Philippe, and his intense dread of war between England and France, compelled him most reluctantly to refrain from openly supporting his nephew's candidature.

Matters remained in this unsettled and unsatisfactory state until 1846, when, owing to an indiscretion on the part of Lord Palmerston, Louis Philippe was given the pretext for the conclusive action he had so ardently desired to take. On July 18th, of that year, the English Foreign Secretary wrote a despatch to Mr. Bulwer, Minister in Madrid, summing up the royal and ministerial point of view regarding Queen Isabel's marriage and mentioning in this despatch Prince Leopold as a still possible candidate for her hand. Unfortunately, Palmerston was so foolhardy as to show a copy of this despatch to Count Jarnac, the French Ambassador in London and, on receipt of the news in Paris that the English Government still contemplated the Coburg Prince as a potential husband for the Spanish Queen, Louis Philippe took instant action. The engagements were at once announced of the Queen of Spain with Don Francisco de Asis and of the Duke of Montpensier with her sister, the Infanta Luisa Fernanda, and the double marriage followed on October 10th, in the Royal Palace of Madrid. It was performed by the Archbishop of Granada, the Patriarch of the Indies, and the next day the marriages were repeated in the Church of the Atocha, where rested Madrid's most venerated image of Our Lady. The Madrilenos were delighted with the weddings, either disregarding or being ignorant of their King

Consort's supposed peculiarities, while Montpensier won instant popularity in Spain.

The effect of the marriages in England surpassed all the fears of the King of the French, and the rage of the Queen was shared by her people. "The settlement of the Queen of Spain's marriage coupled with Montpensier's, is infamous," thundered Victoria to her uncle, "and we must remonstrate. . . . The King should know we are extremely indignant," she continued. ". . . It is done moreover in such a dishonest way. . . ." Later the Queen referred bitterly to the "tricks and over-reaching" of the French. The Prince Consort, although greatly disturbed by these disagreeable events, placed his criticism on a higher plane and wrote sadly but not without some satisfaction to his brother: "What will Louis Philippe have to answer for in Heaven!"

Naturally these complications were most distressing for Leopold, who, not daring to criticise his father-in-law nor to support his niece in her fierce complaints, was exasperated by the rupture of the Entente Cordiale, which had been largely created by his patience and skill. Indeed, the agitation produced by the "Spanish Marriages," coupled with a violent outbreak of political strife in Belgium, caused Louise-Marie much anxiety for her husband's health. "*Il a eu hier soir*," she wrote apprehensively to her mother, "*un accès de colère qui l'a empêché de diner et lui a fait porter le sang à la tête*."

Louis Philippe replied with skilful evasion to the angry protests of the Queen of England and her Government against his behaviour and claimed that the marriage of his son with the Infanta was entirely a family affair. To a lengthy memorandum prepared by the invaluable Stockmar, and read aloud to the patient King, he answered simply: "I don't consider Montpensier's marriage an affair between nations, and the English people in particular care very little about it; it is much more a private affair between myself and the English Secretary, Lord Palmerston, and as such, it will not bring on important political consequences." But Louis Philippe forgot that although he had triumphed over his old enemy, "Pam," the Foreign Secretary, was immensely popular with the English public,

and on this occasion he had received the full approbation of the Queen. His son Prince Joinville had a better appreciation of those unfortunate events and proved an accurate prophet when he wrote in the following year : "Those wretched Spanish Marriages . . . we have not exhausted the depth of bitterness they contain. . . ."

A year later again a dazed old gentleman, accompanied by a pious and pessimistic wife, and a numerous family, arrived on the shores of England to seek the hospitality of her Queen. Leopold had dutifully placed Claremont at their disposal. The King and Queen of the French expressed their desire to be known as the Count and Countess of Neuilly in exile. . . .

CHAPTER EIGHT

"The prosperity of dear little Belgium is a bright star in the stormy night all around."

VICTORIA TO LEOPOLD

THE year of Revolution found Leopold at the height of his personal ascendancy in international affairs and, although nearly sixty, with undiminished mental powers. Certainly he proved young enough to face the grave issues raised in 1848, but perhaps inevitably, too old to assimilate their consequences, for although the occupier of a throne, which he owed to a revolution, he would not admit that other countries had the same right to rebel against unjust rulers and conditions and establish their own independence, as Belgium with his assistance had done in 1832.

Indeed, despite his revolutionary origin as a King, Leopold, the statesman, was always a conservative at heart, but unlike Metternich, he was too great a realist to put principles before expediency. Although rarely alarmed, but frequently irritated by the changes of government in his own country, and treating with indifference their political complexion, he always preferred to see conservative ministries in power abroad. He was in particular much distressed by the fall of the Tories in 1847, and the formation of a strong Whig Government in England, but he greatly exaggerated the liberal tendencies of its leaders, Russell and Palmerston. "The present English Ministry," he wrote to the Archduke John, "is . . . rather favourable to revolutions and all sorts of confusion." He comforted himself, however, with the satisfactory state of affairs in France: "On the other hand," he added, "the present French Ministry is conservative, in the best sense of the word." Although English

politics might disturb him at times, both Leopold and Victoria (after her initial mistakes) always realised the supreme importance of never identifying themselves with any political party in their country. All other rulers were identified with their Conservative politicians and many suffered for this complacency by the loss of their thrones.

Leopold's character and the life he led at the time of this great European crisis, is typical of the man and indicative of the powers he possessed to withstand its repercussions on his own susceptible kingdom.

The simplicity of his daily existence contrasted strangely with his discreet though profligate sexual life. Few courtiers of a monarch who habitually kept a mistress, can have benefited by this indulgence so little, as did the friends and retainers of the first King of the Belgians. There was no gaiety, no profusion at Laeken. His Court was as gloomy as a conventicle. There was above all, no Pompadour at the Court of Brussels, for unless they were powerful, like his niece Victoria, or child-bearers, like Louise-Marie, Leopold had only one use for women. In fact the King had simple habits. He usually dined late and alone.

In conformity with the simplicity of his life, went a complete absence of desire for luxury, in Leopold's character, and his apartments at Laeken, his hunting-box in the Ardennes and the Villa Giulia on Lake Como were all furnished in a bleak and forbidding manner. Even at Laeken, where naturally he spent most of his time, his own sitting-room contained only a few chairs in covers of light colour with drab walls and white curtains and some small but high tables, at which the King wrote, standing. From this description of his living-room, it might be inferred that Leopold had anticipated by eighty years the modern style of decoration, but this simplicity was achieved not by taste nor purpose, but entirely owing to his complete lack of interest in his surroundings, provided they were appropriate and practical. The King had no use for art for art's sake.

In contrast to Leopold's distaste for artistic embellishments, and his lack of any real interest in pure or academic culture, the King well understood how a work of art,

that is in the opinion of its creator, could be utilised for ulterior motives. Soon after his accession to the Belgian throne, he caused an immense statue of Godfrey de Bouillon, on horseback and clutching the flag of the First Crusade, to be erected in front of his Palace at Laeken. It was good for his subjects, Leopold considered, while passing under his window, to have the opportunity of drawing a favourable comparison between the character and achievements of the first King of the Belgians, and the first King of Jerusalem.

In other respects, by 1848, Leopold had perfected his technique in the knowledge and governing of men; an art which he began to appreciate in England over thirty years before, and which he had so diligently practised in Belgium and in Europe since he had become King. He was in fact, by then, a rare example of what can be done by a man with his character, when his heart is completely ruled by his head. Once and once only in his life did Leopold lose his proverbial heart. But it was an experience so bitter and disorganising and he had erected such formidable barriers of hard common sense to prevent the possibility of recurrence, that sentiment in its truest form became an emotion, altogether banished from Leopold's life.

After Leopold had become King of the Belgians, he never made a mistake which could be attributed to the common human failing of unrestrained desire. That he had some sincere affection for his niece Victoria is certain, but he neither loved Louise-Marie nor his children, regarding them as essential but irritating burdens in his life. But not even the most alluring mistress could sway his actions, nor cause him to diverge for an instant from the relentless rhythm of his life.

Leopold's brilliant and almost uncanny grip of both Belgian and European affairs was aided by an unusually retentive memory and excellent health. The latter he attributed chiefly to his great love of walking and, for once he agreed with Lord Palmerston, who maintained that, to keep in perfect health, a man needed four hours' open-air exercise a day. Even when he was staying at Buckingham Palace, Leopold would never break this iron

rule of health, and he often might be seen leaving the Palace at two in the morning by a private gate, alone and on foot, with an umbrella prudently hooked over his arm, to take his four hours' exercise in the heart of the city. He also frequently went hunting and shooting in pursuit of the fox, the wolf or wild boar, pastimes which he practised in the forests of St. Hubert, although his opinion of fox-hunting is, unfortunately, unrecorded, and it is not even certain whether he was so lucky and bold as to ride to hounds in the English 'shires. His niece's disapproval of hunting, however, either on account of its cruelty or because of the dangers risked by Albert in its pursuit, was so strongly pronounced that, on one occasion, she wrote to her uncle saying that, owing to her aversion to hunting, she was delighted to hear that he had shot fifty-one foxes in a day. Of botany also, the King was fond, a hobby which gave him an object in many a long walk in the wilds, but undoubtedly it was the health-giving results of such exercise, rather than the sport or occupation itself that Leopold courted and prized.

Of his retentive memory, such an invaluable asset to Royalty, Leopold was justifiably proud, and he was able to speak four languages perfectly, German, French, English and Russian, and to read in seven. He also possessed that rare gift of an unfailing remembrance of faces as well as of the names of their owners, even when neither were of any consequence. One day, on a walk in Switzerland, Leopold, then a middle-aged man, approached a certain bridge and remarked to his companion: "I passed over this bridge thirty years ago and I relieved a blind man. I am very curious to see if he is still there." Oddly enough the mendicant was, and it is to be hoped that the King relieved him again. Another story is related of how a French lady once imprudently enquired of Leopold, then an old man, whether he had ever been in the army. The King reflected for a moment, he liked to be accurate in his statements, then he coldly replied: "I have been a Field-Marshal forty years—that is all, Madame."

Naturally Leopold, besides these admirable qualities had by now accumulated some personal peculiarities which must have been irritating to his intimates. Even

as a young man he had been unduly frightened of catching cold, and his muff and feather boa will be remembered when he arrived at the Pavilion in February, 1816. With the years this dread had been incongruously intensified, and now he always wore triple-soled boots to prevent any cold or dampness assailing his feet. His thick black wig still unnecessary but, in his opinion, an essential precaution against colds in the head, he had worn for over twenty years, but now he always attempted to speak in a low voice as he hoped that thereby he would preserve his chest and throat. Nervously concerned about his quite exceptional digestion, and regarding riding as an indispensable aid to health, he now always rode ponies with his feet nearly touching the ground so as to avoid any injurious shaking.

But such innocent idiosyncrasies were fully expiated by his many kingly virtues, either inherent or gained by experience, which helped him to weather the storm of 1848, while his own personal position in Belgium and abroad, in that year, was considerably strengthened by the satisfactory condition of his interior politics. The so-called neutral Ministry of M. Charles Nothomb, which had been formed six years earlier, from both the Catholic and Liberal parties, fell in 1846, when a purely Catholic Government took office, under M. de Theux Muelenaere. The power, however, of the Liberals was growing in the country and, having finally abandoned any idea of a renewal of a coalition with their opponents, they were able to reorganise their party on an independent basis. In the following year their policy was justified, since they won an outstanding victory in the General Election and a purely Liberal Ministry was formed under M. Rogier.

The new Government wasted no time in acting up to its principles and immediately passed a progressive electoral law, which extended the franchise to those possessing twenty florins' worth of real estate. This wise and democratic measure was largely responsible for the ease with which Belgium passed through the Year of Revolution, and Lord Palmerston expressed the opinion that, if the Ministry of M. de Theux had been in power at that time in place of that of M. Rogier, Belgium would

have become a republic. Another factor which aided Leopold in maintaining his throne and peace in his country, was the flourishing state of commerce, low taxes and well-ordered finance. He also possessed a loyal and efficient army and police force and the best railway system in Europe. The King had been one of the first to realise the potential value of the new invention, not only as a swift means of moving troops to any scene of disorder, but also as a powerful stimulus to commerce and industry. Both the people and their King were, in 1848, united in their desire to maintain peace and prosperity in Belgium, suspicious alike of tumult and change.

The first sign of the general discontent in Europe, which was still labouring under the moribund hand of the Holy Alliance, was a determined revolt in Cracow in 1846, which broke out simultaneously with a rising of the Polish nobles in Galicia against Austrian rule. The former rebellion was easily crushed, and Cracow was incorporated in the Empire, while in Galicia no Austrian troops were required to quell the nobles, as the serfs themselves, exasperated by years of persecution, instead of supporting their masters, viciously attacked them, burnt their palaces and killed all resisters. The "Celsissimus" was naturally much amused by the outcome of this rebellion and, for once in his life, was loud in his praises of the lower orders.

Two years later, nearly all Europe flared up in revolt. The first monarch to fall was Leopold's father-in-law, Louis Philippe. He lost his throne in February through an amiable weakness ; he declined to shed blood in defence of the crown he had won by the suffrage of the people. "J'abdique, j'abdique," muttered the flustered old King as, surrounded by his querulous family, like an old hen disturbed with her chicks, he made his way through the gardens of the Tuileries, intent on his flight to England.

Leopold was naturally greatly distressed by the events in Paris. He had relied just as much on Louis Philippe as on his niece Victoria for the support of his throne, and now one of the essential props had dropped away. Incidentally, the fall of the Orleans had deprived poor Louise-Marie of any further political value, an added cause of bitterness to the King. "I am very unwell in

consequence of the awful events in Paris," he wrote to his niece on February 26th, and after a passing reference to the sad condition of his wife, he ventured to give the Queen a gentle hint : "Against France, we of course have a right to claim protection from England and the other powers. . . ." Actually the English Government at that moment required no reminder of its obligations. A republic in France with Louis Napoleon as President, demanded more than ever a strong and independent Belgium.

The letters of Louise-Marie to Victoria after her father's fall were wild and almost incoherent : ". . . what an awful overwhelming, unexpected and inexplicable catastrophe . . . I cannot believe it yet. Our anguish has been indescribable . . . it appears to us like a fearful dream." Then she continued more reasonably : "It has also been an immense misfortune that Joinville and Aumale were both away. They were both popular (which poor dear never-to-be-sufficiently-respected Nemours was not) and capable of turning chance in our favour." The Queen of the Belgians was right ; Joinville's presence in particular would have been an asset during the crisis, but it was the death of Louis Philippe's sister Madame Adélaïde, just before the outbreak of the revolution, which deprived the King of his best counsellor and support. Louise-Marie, however, dwelt on Madame's good fortune in dying before the calamity : "He was at least merciful to my dear Aunt. . . ." The letter ended with a practical request which shows how unnecessarily alarmed Leopold was by the revolution in France : ". . . if a republic really established itself in France, it is impossible to tell what may happen . . . your uncle thinks it right that we should remove to some place of safety what we have of precious [*sic*] . . . I will avail myself of the various messengers . . . to send under your care several boxes . . . they contain your uncle's letters and those of my parents—the treasure I most value in the world."

Queen Victoria was deeply moved by the fall of the "excellent" and "amiable" Orleans and much distressed by the account of the King and Queen's undignified escape from Le Havre across the Channel, when, according

to the English Consul at that port, Louis Philippe embarked on the steamer under the name of Mr. Smith, "his whiskers shaved off, a sort of casquette on his head, a coarse overcoat and immense goggles over his eyes."

Affection for the fallen sovereigns did not, however, blind Victoria to political and practical considerations. "We do everything we can," she wrote to Leopold, "for the dear Family . . . but . . . we cannot make common cause with them, and cannot take a hostile position opposite to the new state of things in France." The Queen seemed more inclined to confide in Lord Melbourne than in her uncle. She wrote to him on his birthday, March 15th: "Lord Melbourne's kind heart will grieve to think of the real want the poor King and Queen are in, their dinner-table barely containing enough to eat. . . . What will be their *avenir*? . . . Surely the poor old King is sufficiently punished for his faults. . . ." To Lord John Russell the Queen could not refrain from a reference to the past and a moralising conclusion: "Had the poor King died in 1844 after he came here and before that most unfortunate Spanish marriages question was started, he would have deservedly gone down to posterity as a great monarch. Now, what will be his name in history? His fate is a *great moral*!" History, however, takes a less one-sided view about that delicate question than Queen Victoria. The attitude of the King of Prussia towards the exiled King of the French was more magnanimous, although it was shared by few European sovereigns. He wrote to the Queen: "We owe Louis Philippe eighteen years of peace. No noble heart must forget that."

In other parts of Europe simultaneous and violent rebellions caused considerable alarm to Leopold and Victoria, although the Queen wrote in April reassuringly to her uncle: "Great events make me quiet and calm, and little trifles fidget me and irritate my nerves." Italy broke out in an epidemic of revolutions; a republic was proclaimed in Venice, the Sicilians rose against their King, Ferdinand II, and the Milanese attempted to drive out the hated Austrian governor Radetzky with the active support of Charles Albert of Sardinia. These sporadic and ill-conceived insurrections proved, however, immature and

were ruthlessly suppressed by the military, despite the unconventional behaviour of Pope Pius IX, who imagining he was a Liberal, presumed to declare war on the Austrian Empire. Events in the latter country were also stirring. The Emperor was forced to abdicate and Metternich, banished from his own Vienna, after a short sojourn in England, humbly asked Leopold to be permitted to take refuge in Belgium. The King, with commendable magnanimity, received him with quiet sympathy. He kept his triumph in his heart.

The situation in Germany was also extremely disconcerting for all the reigning families, but as this protracted crisis extended beyond the Year of Revolution, and intimately reacted on the plans and sympathies of both Leopold and Stockmar, it must be considered later. Indeed, wherever the Queen and her uncle turned their startled gaze, revolutions against the thrones of their brother monarchs were in being. Alone in England and Belgium security for the sovereign remained.

Of unrest in England in the 'forties, there was, of course, abundance, but in '48, the only serious disturbance in the British Isles took place in Glasgow, while the much-advertised meeting called by Feargus O'Connor for April 10th, on Kennington Common to carry a petition to the House of Commons in favour of the People's Charter, proved a complete failure. A comic element was introduced into a London agitation when an extremist demonstration took place in Trafalgar Square, followed by an uncertain rush of raw youths in the direction of Buckingham Palace, shouting "*Vive la République.*" The Republicans, however, were glad to disperse on the apprehension of their juvenile leader, who, on being quietly arrested, burst into tears.

Belgium also was immune from serious internal convulsions, although the King took the opportunity of teaching his acrimonious politicians a salutary lesson, after the successful revolution in France. At a Cabinet meeting, Leopold announced in a complacent but gracious manner, that he intended to be no obstacle to the welfare of his people and, in consequence, he would willingly resign his crown if they desired a different form of Government.

The horrified Ministers protested in unison against this playful suggestion of their King.

It is curious, however, to notice that, although internal conditions in both England and Belgium afforded no warrant for unreasonable alarm, both Leopold and Albert, in this case unsupported by the more far-seeing Victoria, gave way to considerable panic during the initial and illusionary successes of the international revolutionary movement. To the Archduke John of Austria, Leopold wrote that the situation in France was bound to end in a Terror like that of 1792, and his remarks on Socialist aspirations echo the opinions of many opponents of that system in Europe to-day : " Every man is to take what he likes and keep what he can." To Queen Victoria he referred sententiously to the welfare of his children under a possible Socialist state : " Poor things ! their existence is a good deal on the cards, and fortunes, private and public, are in equal danger." A previous reference in this letter to his position as King of the Belgians must, in part, have highly amused the Queen : " Curious enough that I, who in fact was desirous of retiring from politics, should be on the Continent the only sovereign who stood the storm, though I am at ten hours' distance from Paris." The suggestion that at that moment or indeed at any other time of his life, he had the faintest intention of withdrawing from politics, shows how capable Leopold was of gross self-deception, although he had every right to feel some justifiable pride at the strength of his position in Belgium. Indeed, Stockmar paid him a deserved tribute when he said that as much as Leopold had achieved in favour of monarchy, his colleagues had done to ruin it.

Even more agitated by the events of 1848 than the King was his nephew Albert who, in February of that year wrote to Stockmar, then in Coburg, a letter which, for its catalogue of anticipated miseries mixed with much unconscious humour, must be unique as coming from that cautious pen. " A European war is at our gates," began the Prince in panic, " France is on fire from end to end ; Louis Philippe, disguised, is in flight ; . . . Guizot is a prisoner ; the Republic is proclaimed ; the army is marching towards the frontier ; the incorporation of

Belgium and the Rhine provinces is announced. Here they refuse to pay income-tax and attack the Ministry ; Victoria will be brought to bed with child in a few days ; our poor grandmother is about to leave this world. I am not discouraged, but . . . come, if you love me, if you love Victoria, if you love Uncle Leopold, if you love your German Fatherland." The Baron loved all four and hastened to obey his beloved pupil, but how, by going to England, Albert imagined Stockmar would benefit his fatherland, was not explained. It testified, however, to the enduring influence which the Baron exercised over Albert that, despite the experience gained by nearly ten years as Prince Consort, despite the support of his adoring wife, the solid advice of Lord John Russell and the grudging admiration of Lord Palmerston, Albert became almost hysterical at the prospect of being faced by novel and intangible dilemmas, without the consolation of the Baron by his side. So Stockmar came to Windsor, to the infinite relief of his Royal hosts and to his own intense self-satisfaction. Coburg, according to the Baron, was a "little hole in an old stove," but London, "a high watch tower, from which he could command the whole of Europe." The latter was a proud but permissible pretension.

The presence of Stockmar in England succeeded in calming the perturbed Albert, and, in consequence, the correspondence between the Queen and her uncle began to assume a more placid and personal tone. Victoria was able to inform Leopold of her unexampled good fortune in discovering a bust of her uncle for sale. Naturally she instantly bought this *objet d'art* : "it is in armour and moustaches," she explained. About the same time she gave her uncle an unexpected present which must have caused the King some sorrowful reflection on the past. "I venture to send you a snuff-box with poor Aunt Charlotte's picture as a child," wrote the Queen, "which also belonged to poor Aunt Sophia." In July, Victoria received the most engaging letter from her first cousin, Princess Charlotte of Belgium, Leopold's only daughter, then eight years old, thanking the Queen for the present of a dolls' house. It is particularly pathetic in view of the Princess' tragic

married life, followed by over fifty years of insanity :
“ . . . every morning I dress my doll and give her a good breakfast ; and the day after her arrival she gave a great rout at which all my dolls were invited. Sometimes she plays at drafts on her pretty little draft-board, and every evening I undress her and put her to bed.”

Two weeks after receiving this enchanting letter from her small cousin, the Queen and all her Coburg relations were immersed in the discussion of German unity, as presented by the National Assembly at Frankfort, which was, perhaps, the most momentous consequence of the Year of Revolution. As this question was probably the most vital in mid-nineteenth-century history, deeply affected both Leopold and Victoria, and nearly changed the quiet tenor of Stockmar's declining years, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the basic problems involved and the deliberations and results of the German National Assembly, convened in the Paulskirche at Frankfort.

The initial impetus to the practical realisation of German unity, as distinct from either a partnership with Austria on an equality basis, or, from a union in which Austria would predominate, was given by the Prussian Zollverein, or Customs Union, which, originating as an internal agreement between the component parts of post-Napoleonic Prussia, had by 1834, incorporated in its sphere of action the greater part of Germany. A remarkable growth of commercial prosperity resulted from this sensible reduction of trade barriers and, despite the continued political discord between rival Princes and Governments, the German people learnt to appreciate through their Zollverein the practical benefits of co-operation in commerce and industry, which taught them to look to Berlin rather than to Vienna as the centre of union.

This dimly self-conscious nationalism, particularly prevalent in the middle classes, the principal gainers from the Zollverein, was considerably strengthened by the accession of Frederick William IV to the Prussian throne in 1840. This Prince had aired Liberal views before his succession, and the adherents of German unity imagined they would secure the King's support from the beginning of his reign. But his opinions proved to be more “romantic” than liberal, as he appeared incapable of

envisaging any union of Germany, except under the House of Hapsburg, in a restored Holy Roman Empire. Therefore, despite continual agitation on the part of Liberal politicians in all the principal states of Germany, until 1848 little progress was realised towards the fulfilment of these ideals. But the abdication of the Emperor of Austria in that year under popular pressure, as well as the exhilarating fall of the "Celsissimus," caused a wave of Liberal feeling to sweep through the country, and all men of culture and enterprise united in their demands for constitutional governments and a National Parliament for Germany.

The various Princes, greatly dismayed by the defeat of autocracy in Austria, were now compelled to look towards Prussia as the only state with sufficient power to lead them in the struggle against their Liberal subjects. King Frederick William, however, was the last man suitable to lead a crusade against Liberalism, or indeed, against anything, much as he might deplore the principles themselves. He also possessed a humanitarian dislike of killing his own people, even when he considered their behaviour disloyal and, in consequence, instead of shooting the insurgents in Berlin on March 15th, as he could have done with little difficulty, he insisted on entering into negotiations with them, which resulted in the withdrawal of the troops from Berlin. Not satisfied, however, with this remarkable abdication of his royal powers, the following day he paraded through the streets of his capital, at the head of a wild procession, wrapped in the German tricolor. But even that gesture did not content the unstable and theatrical monarch, for he wrote to the horrified Tsar a full description of the startling events which had just occurred in Berlin and referred to the achievements of the "Glorious German Revolution."

The deplorable example set by Frederick William in bowing to the revolutionary tornado considerably weakened the powers of resistance, still possessed by the less important German states, to the universal demand for union and reform. The Federal Diet, which had been summoned in the preceding year by the Prussian King, suddenly realised that it was no longer a powerless nonentity, as

in the past, but rather a body relatively representative of the advanced opinion of the age. On March 30th, the Diet hoisted the German tricolor and made preparations for convening a National Parliament at Frankfort. Difficulties abounded, but the still disturbed internal conditions both in Austria and Prussia, where the governments were naturally opposed to this dangerous innovation, facilitated the elections and, eventually on May 18th, a heterogeneous collection of enthusiastic Germans met in the Paulskirche, drawn from every quarter of the land. The representative for Coburg was Baron Stockmar.

It was unavoidable that a gathering of this description should have lacked experience and direction. The Germans are notoriously deficient in the technique of democracy although, on this, their first venture on that perilous sea, they should not be too harshly judged for failing to steer their top-heavy craft into secure harbour, or, as it actually happened, into any harbour at all. Learned professors, rarely practical, and ambitious journalists, seldom disinterested, formed the majority of the members of the Frankfort Parliament. The discussions were bitter and tedious and six weeks passed before agreement on a single subject could be reached. But, on June 29th, the Parliament decided that a "Reichsverweser," or Imperial Vicar, should be appointed who would have power to carry on the Government with a Ministry selected by himself. To fill this invidious position, the Archduke John of Austria was chosen by a large majority, and it was confidently supposed that, as the Archduke had been so liberal minded as to marry the daughter of the Postmaster at Aussee, he would inevitably be a strong supporter of union and reform.

Naturally Leopold had been following the events in Germany with deep and agitated interest, informed of every move in the Paulskirche by the observant Stockmar. The King had no sympathy with the democratic ideals of the majority of the National Parliament, convinced that their realisation would upset the European equilibrium and imperil the safety of Belgium. He also distrusted and feared Prussia, showing keen foresight at a time when that rising country was treated with a complacent

indulgence by the stronger Powers, and he was, in consequence, strongly opposed to any solution of the problem of German unity which excluded Austria from the proposed new Empire. He regarded Catholic Austria, with its numerous non-German population, as a valuable counterpoise to the dangerous Pan-Germanism of Prussia. Leopold, therefore, desired a continuation of the old German Confederation of States, as opposed to any Germanic union which would exclude Austria.

In his adherence to the *status quo*, Leopold can justly be criticised as lacking in proper patriotic fervour for the country to which he owed his birth and upbringing. But the King, who had experienced so many national transformations, had succeeded by now in welding their conflicting emotions into one impartial but intensely personal point of view. By force of character and frequent change, he had eliminated all those prejudices which are the pride and bane of every country, and he appears in retrospect as an aloof international figure, unswayed by petty party or national jealousies, but vitally interested in his Belgian kingdom, the independence and prosperity of which was the foundation and support of his cherished power.

In his extremely conservative if not retrograde attitude towards contemporary German aspirations, Leopold found that his point of view, perhaps on the only occasion in his life, was diametrically opposed to that held by Stockmar. It was not in this case an accidental divergence of opinion, but rather a fundamental difference of outlook, which caused these two fast friends to disagree on this momentous subject. The Baron was convinced that the existing dualism between Austria and Germany was unnatural and undesirable and should be terminated at the first opportunity by a Confederation, excluding Austria. He thoroughly disliked that country, distrusted her non-German elements and considered that she had long enough exploited Germany for her own ends. His ultimate objective was the inclusion of all the German provinces of Austria in a German Empire; in fact, the complete elimination of Austria as a European power. In this drastic Pan-Germanic policy, Stockmar showed himself

to be a more practical and far-seeing statesman than Leopold, since, unlike the King, being an admirer of Prussia and lacking an international outlook, he could concentrate whole-heartedly on the great aspiration of his life ; a united Germany, dominated by Prussia.

Leopold was, no doubt, irritated by Stockmar's antagonistic opinions, but he could hardly expect and deeply resented the enthusiastic adherence of Victoria and Albert to the Baron's point of view. The Prince Consort was naturally cautious in all his memoranda dealing with the German situation, but with his usual perspicacity he realised that the vital question, the relation of Austria and Prussia to each other in any proposed German union, was being deliberately kept in the background at Frankfort, owing to the fierce divergencies of opinion. He also perceived that the Parliament was roughly divided amongst those who desired union and those who demanded social reform, while the delegates in favour of both were in a small minority. Albert clearly foresaw that, from the deliberations at the Paulskirche, Germany could neither hope for union nor reform.

The election of the Archduke John as Imperial Vicar greatly delighted Leopold and he hastened to give him his views on the correct policy to pursue. Germany, the King maintained, should be divided into spheres, a voice should be given to each of these and a Directorate or Imperial administrator should be elected by them for three or five years. With these safeguards, Leopold considered that Prussia could be allowed to enter the confederation or Empire, not indeed as the sovereign of the whole of Germany, but in a directorial capacity.

Apart from pressing his views on the Archduke, the King also busied himself in extolling the admirable qualities of his friend in order to secure him the maximum of influential favour. Count Woyna, the Austrian Minister, however, was sceptical when Leopold informed him that the Archduke was worthy of unqualified support. “. . . It is not in his (Leopold's) character to take any interest in a person or action merely for its own sake,” he wrote to Prince Felix von Schwartzemberg, Metternich's successor, and like Leopold the former lover of Lady Ellenborough, and

continuing, summed up the King's character with considerable truth as well as acidity : " As a high degree of integrity is not easily reconciled with a coldly, calculating, astute, self-centred spirit, we can only take the King's benevolent utterances at their full value when there is a plain interest of his own at the bottom of them."

The formation of an Imperial Government was naturally the Archduke's first task as Imperial Vicar, and he did not hesitate to offer the highest post in his Cabinet, that of Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Stockmar. This remarkable offer was for cogent reasons courteously refused, although it was naturally immensely flattering to the Baron's vanity to be singled out for this honour and showed that, despite his secretive methods in political life, he had obtained a European reputation as a statesman of the front rank. The surface reasons for this refusal were simple and it is, indeed, strange that the Archduke, however much he might have desired Stockmar's co-operation in his formidable task, should have thought it worth his while to approach him, since the Baron was a prominent " Little-German," in the Frankfort Parliament, that party which worked for the domination of Prussia in the new Reich, while the Archduke, as became a Hapsburg, was the leader of the " Greater-Germany " party which supported the supremacy of the Austrian Empire. Even if the Archduke and the Baron had agreed in their politics, it is improbable that Stockmar would have accepted the onerous and thankless position of Foreign Minister. He was, from the beginning, definitely sceptical about the academic discussions in the Parliament, foreseeing their fruitless conclusion, while, in his morbid apprehension of being conspicuous, Stockmar would have suffered deeply in the brilliant but evanescent limelight of the Paulskirche.

That Leopold prompted the Archduke to offer Stockmar office, is impossible, considering the King's knowledge of the Baron's character, and their opposing points of view ; but he almost certainly worked for the appointment of his nephew, Prince Charles of Leiningen, who became President of the Imperial Ministry for one month, during August, in 1848. The increasing weakness of Austria, however, caused by the revolt in Hungary and the war

in Italy, while Vienna even fell into the hands of the revolutionaries for a short time towards the end of the year, was of inestimable value to the "Klein-Deutsch" party which in December overthrew the "Gross-Deutsch" Government and Heinrich von Gagern, the new President, entirely reversed the policy of his predecessor.

The partisans of Prussia at that moment possessed a unique opportunity, for apart from Austria's crippling internal difficulties, all the Protestant States were now prepared to accept Prussian hegemony, while their representatives commanded a majority for a democratic as well as an Imperial constitution for Germany. The first act of the Gagern Ministry, therefore, was to revise the constitution on a more popular basis, a measure enthusiastically accepted by the Parliament, which also decided, by a smaller majority, to maintain the imperial title as an hereditary honour for the House of Prussia. The Austrian representatives bitterly opposed the new constitution, but their counter-proposals were over-ruled and, on March 28th, 1849, King Frederick William IV of Prussia was elected Emperor of Germany.

High hopes were entertained throughout the northern states for the successful outcome of this Prussian and democratic solution of the German national problem, and few anticipated the crushing rejoinder from Berlin. King Frederick William coldly informed the deputation which waited on him that he could not assume the imperial title without the concurrence of all the ruling Princes and free cities and that, in consequence, he must decline "to pick up a crown out of the gutter."

This ruthless answer dealt the death-blow to the National Assembly; Austria had previously withdrawn her representatives as a protest against the imperial title being offered to Frederick William, and now Prussia followed her example. The fatuity of further deliberations was obvious to all the moderate delegates, who withdrew from the assembly, after the rebuff from the Prussian King, although a few republican extremists continued to hold violent if attenuated gatherings at Stuttgart. Eventually they were firmly dispersed by order of the Württemberg Government.

Although Frederick William had fought shy of the

imperial title, he was quite prepared to reap some benefit from the troubles of Austria, so he invited the various German States to send representatives to Berlin and, at the same time, he concluded treaties with the Kings of Hanover and Saxony. The three monarchs then imposed on the assembled delegates a new constitution for Germany, far less democratic than that of Frankfort, and substituted for the imperial authority a supreme chief, supported by a College of Princes. This constitution received the name of the "Union." It was destined to be of a most ephemeral character.

In the autumn of 1849 the German situation underwent a complete change, for Austria, almost miraculously, as it appeared to contemporary Europe, made a sudden recovery from her grave difficulties, both at home and abroad. With Russian assistance the Hungarian revolt was crushed, the short-lived Venetian Republic collapsed and Austria closed the war in Italy with the victories of Custozza and Novara. The Empire, elated, with reason, by her triumphs, was in no mood to tolerate the predominating position assumed by Prussia in Germany. This was the moment, unfortunately a little delayed, that Leopold chose for one of his exhilarating interventions into another nation's affairs.

The King, who had always been convinced that there must be a central and controlling power in Germany, had reluctantly come to the conclusion that Austria was now incapable of playing that role. He therefore began to moderate his antipathy towards Prussia and, in the cause of peace, ventured to give some good advice to Prince Schwartzemberg. After alluding to the vital necessity of preserving the alliance between Austria, Prussia and Russia he attempted to scare the Chancellor by reports of threatened republican and revolutionary movements. "I know for certain," wrote Leopold, "that the Prussian Rhine provinces have sent influential representatives to Paris to learn whether a republic on the Rhine would be acceptable there. The same thing more definitely has been done, etc., etc. . . . Hence the agitation even in the French army and the battle-cry, 'Down with all thrones that still stand.'" It was unfortunate for the King that

a few years later the same French army would be lustily engaged in shouting "Vive l'Empereur," but the moral drawn by Leopold was indisputable, that peace in Germany entirely depended on an equitable understanding between Prussia and the Austrian Empire.

Prince Schwartzemberg, however, was far from disposed to accept the King's far-seeing and temperate advice. He was determined that Europe, and above all Prussia, should learn to respect the revived power of the Austrian eagle, arisen like the Phoenix, with renewed strength and vitality from the prurient ashes of revolution. "Il faut avilir la Prusse et après la démolir" asserted the pugnacious Chancellor and proceeded to carry out the first part of his comprehensive policy.

First the "Union", engineered by Prussia, had to be rendered innocuous. Hanover and Saxony, under Austrian pressure, consented to sever their connection with that body and, joining Bavaria, agreed to a re-establishment of the old German Confederation. Prussia became, not unnaturally, alarmed and attempted to gauge European opinion and the possibility of obtaining outside support by a *ballon d'essai*. She discreetly proposed the formation of an alliance to England and France and, in order to excite English sympathy, suggested that a small kingdom might be carved out of Thuringia for Prince Alfred, later Duke of Edinburgh, at that time six years old. Even the Prince Consort, pro-Prussian as he undoubtedly was, realised the impossibility of the proposal. "The idea of such an alliance," he wrote to Leopold, "and a Thuringian state for a child of six is in itself too absurd to be entertained." Later, in the same letter, Albert astutely remarked: "It is well known that . . . England does not like to tie its hands as regards remote eventualities. . . ."

The *ballon d'essai* having proved a lamentable failure, Prussia was further harassed by the results of a revolutionary outbreak in Hesse-Cassel, which nearly led her into war with Austria, for which she was totally unprepared. Claiming that, under the terms of the "Union", she had a right to intervene to preserve the Hessian constitution, the Prussian Government despatched an army to occupy a part of the country; a move which was at once

answered by Austria and Bavaria, whose joint forces occupied Cassel.

For this foolhardy action, Prussia paid dearly, as the sudden realisation of her inability to wage war against the combined armies of her opponents compelled the Prussian Government to order an ignominious withdrawal from Hesse, and Austria, elated by this welcome indication of weakness, decided to press her advantage ruthlessly home. Accordingly, Prince Schwartzenberg forwarded an ultimatum to the Prussian Government, demanding amongst other conditions the dissolution of the "Union" and the partial demobilisation of the Prussian army. Unable to resist these crushing demands, Baron Manteuffel was compelled to sign a convention embodying these terms at Olmutz on November 29th. Rarely before in her history had Prussia suffered such humiliation. But seventeen years later Sadowa was to prove that at Olmutz Austria had gained a pyrrhic victory.

Leopold had watched the conclusion of the struggle between Austria and Prussia with sincere and increasing apprehension. As a man who had learnt from experience the wisdom of compromise and moderation, he viewed with misgivings, the consummate triumph of the Austrian Empire, although a Prussian victory would have been considerably more distasteful to a Prince who had assisted at the Congress of Vienna. But in his pious hope that Austria and Prussia could be persuaded to compose their difficulties and work as equal partners for the well-being of all Germans, Leopold showed lack of vision and no grasp of reality. In his distrust, however, of a Prussian domination in Germany, Leopold was supported by his niece, who had not yet altogether accustomed herself to accept, without question, the opinions of the Prince Consort. In the present instance she was deeply shocked by the pro-Prussian attitude of Stockmar, although undoubtedly it was largely shared by Albert and, in a letter to her uncle in August, 1848, the Baron is severely criticised. "Stockmar I do not quite understand, and I cannot believe that he really wishes to ruin all the smaller states, though his principal object is that unity which I fear he will not obtain. I do not either at all agree in his wish that

Prussia should take the lead ; his love for Prussia is to me incomprehensible. . . . Stockmar cannot be my good old friend if he has such notions of injustice. . . .”

More logical, more far-seeing were the views, so anti-pathetic to Leopold, so forcibly held by Albert and Stockmar. They knew that unity could only be obtained by the elimination of Austria and by the assumption by Prussia of the supreme control in Germany, and that all confederations and parliaments were fatuous ; cowardly and vain resources for postponing the inevitable. They were right, for notwithstanding the endless confabulations in the Paulskirche, the issue between Austria and Prussia, in spite of Olmutz, utterly defied settlement. After the Frankfort failure the Baron summed up, with brutal realism, the whole problem of German unity in these words : “ What means remain to us for amalgamating the opposed interests and forming the National Unity ? There is only one : War.”

CHAPTER NINE

“We women are not made for governing—and if we are good women we must dislike these masculine occupations.”

VICTORIA TO LEOPOLD

ALMOST as stimulating to Leopold and contemporary with the German struggle towards unity were the stirring events in Italy, which were directed with less power but with no less enthusiasm towards the same end. It is difficult to imagine what conceivable justification the King thought he possessed for such wholesale interference in Italian affairs, except in so far as he was concerned for the preservation of peace in Europe, since, while as a German Prince he had been inevitably entangled in the issues debated at Frankfort, no national or family tie connected him with Italy, and his interest in Austria was only based on expediency and respect.

It is curious that the election of a Pope should ever have proved an incitement to revolution, but so it happened in 1846 when Giovanni Mastai-Ferretti ascended the throne of St. Peter under the title of Pius IX. He was known to be a cleric of liberal and national ideals, so naturally papal acquiescence was claimed for Italian aspirations towards unity and reform. Previous Popes had always been on the side of established authority, whether in the shape of Italian rulers or Austrian Governors; but the seemingly impossible had now occurred; Rome was ruled by a liberal Pope. So impressed, in fact, was the Government in England by the liberal tendencies of the new Pontiff that the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, despatched his father-in-law, Lord Minto, on a special mission to Rome in order to stimulate the Pope in his advocacy of these commendable Whig views. Judged by results, this

mission proved a failure. A revolution in the Eternal City, followed by a brief sojourn in Gaeta and a Tory Pope returned to the Vatican.

But Pius' congenial views on his elevation had worked as a powerful incentive to the exasperated Italian patriots, who rose almost simultaneously against their oppressors in the Two Sicilies, Tuscany, Venice and Milan. This outbreak, which won several initial successes, including Radetzky's enforced withdrawal from Milan, was greeted with almost universal disapproval and alarm by all responsible members of the non-revolutionary governments, with the single exception of the precocious Lord Palmerston, who was enchanted with the grave difficulties by which the Austrian Empire was suddenly faced. Although the English Foreign Minister was unduly biased in his own attitude towards Austria, largely due to his fear of the "Celsissimus," with Cavour the only foreign statesman at that time of Lord Palmerston's calibre, his enthusiasm for the cause of Italian unity was no personal idiosyncrasy. He had realised at once the advantage to England of having a strong and united Italy to balance France in the Mediterranean and was determined to encourage the movement with all his power. So once again, under her astute Foreign Secretary, England could pose as the champion of the oppressed nationalities and at the same time serve her own particular ends.

Few Englishmen at the time, however, realised how ingenious and far-seeing was the policy of Lord Palmerston. On the contrary, the majority was puzzled and irritated by his active intervention in a country where English interests were in no wise involved. Above all, the Queen and the Prince Consort did not attempt to disguise their indignation at "Pam's" proceedings, and Victoria longed to dismiss her turbulent and disobedient Minister. Naturally, Leopold was unable to remain a passive spectator of his niece's struggle with Palmerston, or "Pilgerstein" as he was usually called by both niece and uncle, (a poor joke, "Palmer" being "Pilger" in German), and he therefore hastened to Windsor to offer his advice to combat his wild manœuvres. The King, by temperament and experience, was incapable of understanding the spirit of

nationalism which seemed to appeal so strongly to Palmerston, provided, as in the case of Ireland, it was not too near home. Leopold had long ago risen into the higher cosmopolitan atmosphere, discarding all national prejudice, and was impatient at the suggestion that, because the northern Italians claimed, as Italians, the right to be free from Austrian rule, they should receive on those grounds any general support. In Leopold's opinion nationalism was a dangerous principle which might be universally applied, and time was to show that the King was right.

The confusion in Austria and the initial successes of the north Italian insurrection made Leopold doubt if the Empire would ever be able to restore the *status quo*. The situation was one much to his fancy, and he suggested to the harassed Austrian Chancellor that a European Conference should be held to discuss the Austro-Italian question—at Brussels. It was a brilliant proposal on the part of the most astute Prince of the day. A European Conference at Brussels, naturally with himself in the chair, besides satisfying his personal vanity, would have proved to the nations that despite the fall of Louis Philippe, the King of the Belgians was still the arbiter of Europe. Incidentally such a conference would have been an admirable advertisement of his beneficent rule and brought considerable trade to his capital.

But the differences between Austria and her rebellious Italian subjects, aided by the King of Sardinia, were settled by the sword and not by a conference: Custoza in the summer of '48 and Novara in March of the following year, brilliant victories won against Charles Albert by the aged Field-Marshal Radetzky, dissipated all Leopold's hopes for a conference in Brussels or elsewhere. Prince Schwartzenberg no longer required mediation or advice from the King of the Belgians, and the Peace Treaty signed at Milan in August, 1849 compelled Sardinia to pay substantial indemnities to Austria, although the influence of the English Government prevented the Empire from insisting on territorial concessions from her vanquished enemy.

This abrupt and conclusive termination of the first Austro-Italian war had the rare consequence of uniting

together Leopold and Palmerston in mutual disappointment and surprise. Naturally, "Pam's" mortification was far the greater, witnessing the crushing defeat of his protégé Sardinia, and the complete re-establishment of Austrian rule in northern Italy. Indeed, the whole of Europe regarded the Austrian victory as a signal defeat for the English Secretary of State who, alone of European statesmen, with the exception of those in the Kingdom of Sardinia, had persistently and openly encouraged the enemies of the Empire. Leopold, however, had been greatly disconcerted by the unlucky circumstances which had ridden, rough-shod, over his love of compromise and had rendered still-born, his cherished conference in Brussels. But his impatience of nationalism and his sentimental respect for Austria soon reconciled him to the *status quo*. Indeed, shortly after the conclusion of peace he was throwing lavish bouquets at Prince Schwartzberg : "All the news about the glorious old Monarchy," he wrote to the Chancellor, "to which I am cordially devoted, is calculated to fill every friend of Austria with courage and hope."

The Austro-Italian conflict, of which Leopold, had he been of a less meddlesome disposition, could have remained a passive spectator, was barely concluded when his attention was anxiously removed to the disturbing events in France. There, indeed, the King of the Belgians found food for thought. As soon as Louis Napoleon was elected President, Leopold was convinced that the restoration of his uncle's Empire was only a question of time and opportunity and, with a vivid recollection of the former Napoleonic regime, he began to entertain grave fears for the peace of Europe and the security of Belgium.

It is curious to relate that, during the early phases of the French Revolution of '48, Louise-Marie, in her quiet way, played no inconspicuous part. Her first concern had naturally been the safety of her parents and, although they were now installed in comparative comfort at Claremont, typical of her race, she was only grudgingly grateful for the security and hospitality which England had provided for her family. Indeed, on the grounds of dignity, climate and convenience, she continuously urged them to leave

Claremont and make their home in Sicily, where her father and mother had married and where she herself had been born. But Louis Philippe and Marie Amélie declined to be moved, for despite the climate and inaccessibility of England, they were well aware that nowhere else in Europe would they be so free from embarrassments or so sympathetically welcomed by any other sovereign, as by Queen Victoria.

Her parents at any rate secure, even if, in her opinion, unwisely domiciled, Louise-Marie, for the first time in her life, and almost, as it happened, at its close, mustered sufficient courage to hold political views and to express them. No stimulus other than the disaster befalling her father would have been strong enough to arouse her, and she strictly curtailed her activities to France.

Immediately after Louis Philippe had fled from Paris, the Queen of the Belgians maintained that the monarchy would have been saved had her brothers, the Dukes of Joinville and Aumale, been at their father's side instead of being engaged in operations in Algeria. Joinville, in particular, was immensely popular in France and had he stood for the Presidency in December, '48, even against Louis Napoleon, he would probably have stood a good chance of success. Political as well as family considerations, Joinville being only a younger son of the King, prevented the realisation of this forlorn hope as well as the determined and unexpected opposition of his sister, Louise-Marie. Possibly she was too unnerved by recent events to countenance an experiment which might expose her family to further risks and humiliations.

Unlike Leopold, who was greatly embittered by the overwhelming victory of Louis Napoleon at the election, (he polled over five million votes, while General Cavaignac received less than one and a half million), Louise-Marie took his success philosophically and wrote to her mother early the next year: "*Le Président montre du tact et du bon sens.*" Undoubtedly he had, but it was courageous of the Queen to acknowledge it. Despite this apparently crushing triumph, however, Louise-Marie did not despair of an ultimate victory for monarchy in France, and she worked hard to secure a fusion between the

Legitimist and Orleanist parties. Together, they could muster five hundred deputies in the Chamber, but their hatred of each other far exceeded their mutual dislike of the President or the Republicans. This was evident when the opportunity for a reconciliation between both branches of the Royal House of France was offered by the sterility of the wife of the Comte de Chambord, the son of the murdered Duke of Berri. It was then suggested, by some conciliatory deputies, that Chambord should adopt as his heir the Comte de Paris, son of the Duchess of Orleans. Unreasoning jealousy prevented the acceptance of this wise solution to the internecine feud between the two families, which alone enabled Louis Napoleon to re-establish the imperial throne.

Even this last lamentable failure and the growing power and popularity of the French President could not embitter the Queen's outlook towards France. Leopold had become increasingly virulent and Louise-Marie wrote sadly to her mother : "Leopold dit qu'il n'y a pas de mal à ce que la république soit battue et ridiculisée," but she added with spirit : "Je ne partage pas ce sentiment et la France républicaine où non, est toujours la France."

These fine sentiments were the prelude to a sudden and pathetic tragedy. On August 26th, 1850, Louis Philippe died at Claremont. Greville, then at Brighton, wrote acidly but with considerable truth in his diary that : "Now hardly more importance attaches to the event than there would be to the death of one of the old bathing-women opposite my window." But Louise-Marie was naturally overwhelmed by the death of her father, who had given her in some measure the love and understanding denied by her husband, and the unexpected calamity of his fall, followed by his sudden death, proved too great a strain for her weak heart and constitution to bear. Louise-Marie went into a rapid decline without the will or desire to recover. She was not yet forty, but years of repression and lack of sympathy had broken her powers of resistance to sorrow.

At Ostend on Friday, October 11th, at eight in the morning, died Louise-Marie of Orleans, first Queen of the Belgians. Her agony lasted more than four hours. She

was surrounded by her family and her hand lay in Leopold's, but her thoughts were with Joinville, who, one day, she was certain, would save France. A few days later her body was carried across Belgium from Ostend to Brussels, where, in the Church of St. Michel et Gudule, Father Deschamps, a famous Redemptorist, and later Archbishop of Malines, preached the funeral sermon. His peroration was appropriate and beautiful: "Dieu a voulu la voir mourir à l'extrémité du royaume, à fin que, portée à travers nos provinces comme sur les bras du population, jusqu'au tombeau qu'elle avait choisi, elle imprimât en passant dans le cœur de tous l'empreinte de sa sainte vie et de sa sainte mort." She was buried in the Church of St. Mary at Laeken.

Leopold's reactions to the sudden death of Louise-Marie, who was over twenty years younger than himself, can have been neither profound nor lasting. He married her for political and dynastic reasons and she had fulfilled her mission in both respects. The fall of her father had, in the most vexing manner, destroyed all her political value, while having borne him three children she was no further use to him as a wife. He had never loved her nor received any mental nor intellectual pleasure from her company. Inevitably, after nearly twenty years of married life, the death of Louise-Marie made a tiresome gap in his well-organised existence. She had become a habit, that was all.

At the funeral he can hardly have failed to compare the different circumstances under which his two wives had been laid in their tombs. With Charlotte had been interred not only his son, heir to the throne of England, but also his own brilliant future as husband of the Queen. He had buried as well, the first and only woman he had ever loved. The death of Louise-Marie occasioned him only passing regrets, proving a vaguely disturbing incident in his life. Her fertility was no longer necessary, she was only the daughter of a fallen King. But an academic admiration for her virtues he felt and expressed in these words: "Her death, like her life, was holy."

Queen Victoria did not follow her uncle's calm example at the death of Louise-Marie; on the contrary, she reacted

in her usual hysterical manner, inevitable on the death of any relative. She was, however, in this instance, genuinely attached to her young aunt. "What a day Tuesday must have been! Welch einen Gang! And yesterday! . . . To talk of her is my greatest consolation! Let us all try to imitate her!" Thus Victoria began her letter of condolence and then expressed her determination to visit Leopold at the earliest possible moment, "to cry with you and to talk with you of her . . . to be able to mingle our tears with yours over her tomb! . . . My first impulse was to fly at once to you, but perhaps a few weeks delay will be better," sentiments with which, no doubt, Leopold must have heartily concurred. Continuing, the Queen cannot resist the urge to dwell on her uncle's presumed misery: "Daily will you feel more, my poor dear Uncle, the poignancy of your dreadful loss. . . ." At the close of her letter, Victoria implored Leopold to be allowed to write to him not only on her customary Tuesdays, but on Fridays as well, the day she had always written to Louise-Marie, and she ended with the words she had not used since a girl: "Ever your devoted niece and loving child, Victoria, R." The Queen, however, was not content with commiserating with her uncle, for having received a letter from "dear little Charlotte, which is so nicely written, and shows such an amiable disposition, I send her to-day a little heart for the hair of our blessed Angel, which I hope she will often wear."

The Prince Consort was more restrained in his comments on Louise-Marie's death, and he wrote dutifully to Stockmar: "The accounts of the last moments of our excellent Aunt are most touching . . . Victoria is profoundly afflicted. Her Aunt was her only confidante, her only friend . . ." He continued in this strain for the greater part of the letter, but the conclusion is of importance, as showing Albert's persistent and almost pathetic reliance on the Baron, although he had now been married over ten years, and his advice was eagerly sought and highly valued by politicians of every age and party. "Our Uncle will have need of you by him; we have need of your presence, of your counsel, of your friendship in a thousand matters of importance, not only for us, but for the whole family,

for England, and through her, for the whole world." This urgent call for help, so reminiscent of that made by Albert two years before, clearly indicated that, although the immediate and pressing dangers of the year of Revolution were past, the influence of the Baron over the Prince Consort's mind and actions was as powerful and unimpaired as ever.

Shortly after the death of his wife, Leopold retreated to his house in the Ardennes to enjoy some sport. He went unaccompanied by his family. From there he wrote to his niece, praising the mild autumn weather, the beauties of the Meuse Valley, and harping on his love of solitude. The Queen, in her reply, expressed her disapproval of this seclusion. "I grieve to hear of you going alone to Ardenne; it is *bad* for you to be alone, and your poor children also ought not to be alone." It is probable that the children were far more often alone than their father.

Victoria, however, had many worries besides her uncle's recluse existence to occupy her attention in 1850. In October an Austrian General named Haynau, who had earned an odious reputation as a flogger of women in the Hungarian Rebellion, paid a most unwise and unwelcome visit to England. Indeed, so great was the public feeling against "General Hyena," as he was naturally nicknamed, that when he visited the brewery of Messrs. Barclay and Perkins he was savagely assaulted by the draymen, compelled to make an ignominious flight and take refuge in a neighbouring house. Inevitably the episode was as annoying to the Austrian Government as it was gratifying to Lord Palmerston, who, although forced by diplomatic usage to despatch a formal apology to the Ballplatz, inserted a most offensive paragraph about "General Hyena." The Queen was much incensed by this breach of etiquette and her indignation was considerably increased when, in his explanation of his conduct, "Pilgerstein" drew an unflattering comparison between the Austrian General and Mrs. Marie Manning, recently executed for murder. This creature, an ex-lady's maid, said to have suggested "Hortense" in *Bleak House* to Dickens, had been convicted jointly with her husband of the murder of a guest. On the scaffold Mrs. Manning had

worn a creation of black bombazine, which caused that popular material to go out of fashion amongst ladies of fine feelings for some time to come.

Apart from the perennial irritation caused by Lord Palmerston's drastic behaviour, the Queen had reason to complain to her uncle, during the latter part of this year, of a violent outburst of anti-Catholic feeling in England, and, although Stockmar was fortunately at Windsor, ("Good Stockmar is well and always of the greatest comfort and use to us"), he could do nothing by advice to allay the religious storm. The audacious activities of the Puseyites had long caused the Queen and the more Protestant section of her subjects intense indignation when, in September, the Pope restored the Catholic hierarchy in England, dividing the country up into twelve Sees (previously there had been eight Vicars Apostolic), with Cardinal Wiseman as Archbishop of Westminster. This so-called "Papal Aggression" was responsible for an angry and universal cry of "No Popery," and Catholics were vilified in the most ridiculous manner. The Queen did not share in this anti-papal hysteria and, although agreeing in principle with Dr. Arnold's dictum, "I look upon a Roman Catholic as an enemy in his uniform; I look upon a Tractarian as an enemy disguised as a spy," she wrote with creditable impartiality to her aunt, the Duchess of Gloucester: "I cannot bear to hear the violent abuse of the Roman Catholic religion, which is so painful and cruel towards the many good and innocent Roman Catholics."

This unexpected leniency towards her Catholic subjects did not prevent the Queen from suspecting a Popish plot on the Continent, with Austria as the Titus Oates, since she wrote to her uncle: "I believe that Austria fans the flame at Rome, and that the whole movement on the Continent is anti-Constitutional, anti-Protestant and anti-English." The King, who had forgotten or had never truly comprehended the Englishman's singular preoccupation with religion, wrote soothingly on the subject and attempted to turn his niece's mind to the general unrest in Europe: "I trust you may be spared religious agitation," he wrote rather inconsequently in November;

"these sort of things begin with one pretext and sometimes continue with others," he added obscurely, but "I don't think Europe was ever in more danger, il y a tant d'anarchie dans les esprits."

Certainly, Leopold had every reason to be disturbed by events on the Continent, particularly in France, and he was convinced that with the restoration of the Empire, which he saw fast approaching, Louis Napoleon would attempt to regain the French frontiers won by his uncle. This conviction threw Leopold into a considerable panic and he strived to create general alarm regarding the future motives of the President and to enlist all possible European support for the protection of his kingdom. He even sought, and at long last secured the recognition of the Tsar who, having up to that time persistently refused to send any representative to the Belgian Court, now consented to appoint a Consul-General in Brussels.

This condescension on the part of the Tsar was small comfort to Leopold when on December 2nd, 1851, the anniversary of the battle of Austerlitz, Louis Napoleon carried out his famous *coup d'état*, which, besides giving France a new and more conservative constitution, made him President of the Republic for ten years with practically sovereign rights. The King at once wrote to his niece expressing his apprehension of the event: ". . . Perhaps we shall for a time have much to suffer as the *gloire française* invariably looks to the old frontiers." In a letter which crossed his, the Queen showed more girlish excitement than dismay at the news: ". . . what do you say to the wonderful proceedings at Paris, which really seem like a story in a book or a play!"

That good may come out of evil was proved for Leopold by one unexpected result of the *coup d'état*. News of the President's dramatic action was announced to Lord Palmerston on December 3rd, by the French Ambassador, Count Walewski, a natural son of the first Napoleon and therefore a first cousin of the President. The Foreign Secretary who, in conformity with the wishes of the Queen and the Cabinet, had previously written to Lord Normanby, the English Ambassador in Paris, instructing him to maintain a passive and neutral attitude towards the

President's conjectured *coup d'état*, now informed Count Walewski that he entirely approved of the President's action and of his wisdom, in striking the blow when he did. Lord Palmerston added that of course everyone was aware that the Duchess of Orleans was preparing to be called to Paris with her younger son, presumably Joinville, to begin a new period of rule of the Orleans dynasty. This irregular and inconsequent behaviour proved Palmerston's undying hatred of Louis Philippe for the humiliation of the "Spanish Marriages," since, the danger of the Duchess of Orleans and her son figuring in any rising against the President, was so remote as to be politically negligible.

Naturally the Queen was aghast at the preposterous conduct of Lord Palmerston, who for years had ignored her wishes, left her letters unanswered and ran the foreign affairs of the nation as if he were subject to no superior control. The opportunity now offered for being rid of her *bête noir*, the Queen determined not to miss and, for once, she had the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, on her side, who always in the past had stood in some awe of his popular and independent colleague. But now Lord John himself felt slighted and embittered by Palmerston's rash impudence and gallantly saved the Queen from the disagreeable task of dismissing him herself by informing the Foreign Secretary that, in consequence of his "violations of prudence and decorum", he must request him to return his Seals of Office into the hands of the Queen. The hasty offer of the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland and an English peerage was instantly and scornfully rejected by Lord Palmerston.

The Queen was nearly delirious with joy at the dismissal of her arch-enemy and wrote ecstatically to Leopold: "I have the greatest pleasure in announcing to you a piece of news which I well know will give you as much satisfaction and relief as it does to us and will do to the whole of the world. *Lord Palmerston is no longer Foreign Secretary.*" Naturally, no piece of news could have delighted Leopold more. Here at least was some consolation for the *coup d'état*. A week later the Queen again referred with rapture and, for her, an unusual bitter-

ness to Lord Palmerston's fall : " Now he has done with the Foreign Office for ever, and ' the veteran statesman,' as the newspapers to our great amusement and I am sure to his infinite annoyance call him, must rest upon his laurels. . . ."

Events in the near future were to render premature this acid chuckle of the Queen for, within a year, " Pam " was back in office as Home Secretary and, within three, Victoria was forced to call upon him to form a Government. She was also unaware that the dismissal of Palmerston, far from lowering his prestige in the country, immeasurably increased his popularity and laid the foundations of the impregnable position he held in his declining years. But at that moment Victoria, Albert and Uncle Leopold were too busy in patting their respective royal backs to care for the future. " Pilgerstein " was disgraced and dismissed. It was for them as if a running sore had been eradicated from the body politic.

Indeed, the year 1851 had brought much comfort to the Queen and her uncle, for besides the fall of Palmerston, a purely negative accomplishment, the Prince Consort with the opening of the Great Exhibition crowned with success the most constructive achievement of his life. International exhibitions later became so frequent that, it is to-day, difficult to understand the intense enthusiasm and, at the same time, the bitter opposition which greeted the Prince's original and daring enterprise. Even Lord Brougham, a self-seeking though enlightened statesman, attacked the scheme and denied the right of the Crown to hold an exhibition in Hyde Park. In the House of Commons, Colonel Sibthorp led a group of embittered malcontents, according to the Queen, a " set of fashionables and Protectionists," who were always suspicious of the Prince Consort's activities and jealous of his organising powers. Colonel Sibthorp asserted that, with the opening of the exhibition, England would be overrun with foreign rascals and anarchists, who would subvert the morals of the people, filch their trade secrets from them and destroy their religion and loyalty to the Crown. Fortunately the Colonel's gloomy prophecies were not fulfilled, for six million people visited the exhibition housed in Paxton's immense

conservatory, displaying both decorum and admiration, and profits of £150,000 were made, which were used to build the South Kensington and other Museums.

Of the many formidable difficulties which Albert and Joseph Paxton had to overcome to realise this success, one, at the last moment before the opening, seemed to defy solution. It was discovered that a vast quantity of sparrows were in possession of one of the high elms enclosed in the building. It was not unnaturally supposed that the droppings of these birds would damage the exhibits below. The Duke of Wellington, as Ranger of Hyde Park, was sent for by the Queen and asked to give his opinion as to how these pests should be dealt with. "Try sparrow-hawks, ma'am," His Grace replied.

The Queen was naturally radiant at the praise and publicity which Albert won on the opening of the Great Exhibition, and two days later she wrote with joy to her uncle: "I wish you could have witnessed May 1st, 1851, the greatest day in our history, the most beautiful and imposing and touching spectacle ever seen, and the triumph of my beloved Albert. Truly it was astonishing, a fairy scene. Many cried, and all felt touched and impressed with devotional feelings."

But Leopold could enjoy little reflected glory from the Great Exhibition to compensate him for the presumed designs of Louis Napoleon, and clearly the President was more of a menace to Belgium than to the British Empire. In consequence, the King was immensely grateful for his niece's assurance early the next year that, any attempt on Belgium by France, would be a *casus belli* for England. This declaration was timely and consoling for, in December Louis Napoleon was elected Emperor of the French by a plebiscite in which he polled nearly eight million votes against two hundred and fifty thousand. Leopold may have been a little comforted for this resounding victory by a delightful anecdote, related by his niece in a letter, in which she referred to Louis Napoleon's entry into Paris. It appeared that, under one of the triumphal arches a crown had been suspended from a cord over which were the words: "Il l'a bien mérité." Somehow the crown had been damaged and had, therefore, to be removed

before the Emperor passed under the arch, but unfortunately the swinging rope and superscription remained. "The effect of which," in the Queen's opinion, "must have been somewhat edifying."

This Napoleonic though bloodless victory served as an added inducement to the King to propagate a feeling of general distrust of the new Emperor, particularly as the latter had recently issued a decree confiscating all the property of the House of Orleans, which considerably affected the pockets of Leopold and his children. At the same time he attempted to persuade Prince Schwartzberg that the resurrection of the Holy Alliance was the only means to guard against the designs of imperial France. "A great military nation is justified in wishing to obliterate a past misfortune by new and brilliant deeds," he wrote to the Austrian Chancellor: ". . . the history of 1805-1813 must be read over again. . . . To check these ambitions . . . there is only one means—that the three great continental powers remain closely united, not for an attack, but to meet any aggression. If England can be induced to enter this purely defensive alliance . . . it will be a great accession of power." England, however, so far from being prompted to join a defensive alliance against France was, less than two years later, united with the Emperor in an offensive war against the Tsar.

Schwartzberg, in his reply to this letter, ignored the King's suggested alliance and, taking advantage of his correspondent's obvious anxiety for the safety of Belgium, delivered Leopold a lecture on his internal affairs and urged him to adopt a more conservative policy in his own Kingdom. Leopold was much incensed by the Chancellor's interfering suggestions, of which he complained bitterly to his niece, nor had he any intention of imitating in Belgium the Prince's drastic measures in the Austrian Empire. Prince Felix Schwartzberg, however, was a brilliant, even if reactionary statesman and, although his sudden death that year from apoplexy was not deeply mourned at Laeken, his firm and energetic rule, had he lived, might have saved Austria many of the humiliations she suffered during the next fifteen years.

Besides attempting to stimulate Austrian antagonism

towards Napoleon, which was hardly necessary, considering the origin of the French Empire and the probable desire of the new Emperor to increase his prestige by interfering in northern Italian affairs, Leopold also endeavoured to awaken in Russia, a feeling of apprehension towards Napoleon III. With that purpose in view, in June he visited Wiesbaden, incognito, and enjoyed many earnest conversations with the wife of the Tsar. Presumably they were fruitful, for shortly after, the Russian Ambassador in London was empowered to inform Leopold that the Tsar would oppose French aggression in Belgium.

The King felt much relieved by this new assurance of support, particularly as he realised that Napoleon, apart from his designs on Belgium, must inevitably, with his Orleanist connections, regard him as a potential enemy. Indeed, the Emperor was by no means pleased with Leopold on account of his recent diplomatic activities, which were clearly aimed at securing the isolation of France, and he once remarked in conversation, with the object of it being repeated to the King that, in order to protect France from invasion, it would be necessary to incorporate Belgium in his Empire. Napoleon added that, only by a suitable display of sympathy for France, might Belgium be able to avoid this fate.

This definite threat, although considerably discounted by the general support on which he could rely, convinced the King that it would be prudent on his part to profess more amicable feelings towards the powerful and popular Emperor of the French. Leopold had become acquainted with Louis Napoleon in the days of his exile in England, when, of no political importance, and living with his mistress Miss Howard, in somewhat mixed society in London, young Bonaparte begged the King of the Belgians to buy his bills of exchange. That Leopold, with little sympathy for obscure and unsuccessful adventurers, should have consented to this surprising request, was a proof of his belief in Louis Napoleon's capabilities and integrity. It is also possible that Leopold was not uninfluenced by the recollection of his tender feelings for his mother, Queen Hortense, in the fading splendour of Malmaison. But whatever his motives, his action was

justified when, after Napoleon came to the throne, the King made a large sum of money from this strange transaction.

While Queen Victoria had less reason than her uncle to fear the effect on her Kingdom of Louis Napoleon's victory, and exhibited more excitement than apprehension on his becoming Emperor of the French, she was deeply distressed by the death of the Duke of Wellington, at the age of eighty-three, on September 14th of that year. The Duke had for some time ceased to exercise any substantial influence in either political or military affairs owing to his age and debility while, on account of his frequent outbursts of rage, he had long been inaccessible, except to the succession of complacent ladies who ministered to him in his senile decay. Nevertheless, the Queen was distraught at the death of the "old rebel," complained that the loss was irreparable, asserted that he was the greatest man that England had ever produced and, what to the Queen was his most commendable virtue, that he was "the most devoted and loyal subject," and "the staunchest supporter the Crown ever had."

Leopold wrote at once on the news reaching Brussels, a letter of restrained condolence, pointing out the Duke's devotion to his niece and his appreciation of Albert. He then referred to the distant past and gratefully remarked that even, in 1814, the Duke had been favourable to his marriage with Charlotte, "then in agitation." According to the King, Wellington had been "always kind and confidential, even in those days of persecution against me, the result of the jealousy of George IV." Admitting that he had possessed some "old, obsolete notions," Leopold continued his letter by contending that the Duke was the noblest example of what an Englishman could be, and he could not refrain at its conclusion from making this political comparison: "When one looks at the Manchester School," he ended pessimistically, "compared to the greatness to which men like the Duke raised their country, one cannot help being alarmed for the future."

The inconsequence and banality of this last remark could be excused by the fact that, although twenty years his junior, Leopold had always considered himself the

Duke's contemporary, indeed, he had known him well for nearly forty years and had begun to view progressive politics with the same prejudiced outlook of old age. It was, however, significant that a man like Leopold, who was certainly no lover of war or warriors, could praise so highly a man, whose position had been won entirely by the sword, since on those rare occasions when the Duke may have shone as a statesman, his success was due to the prestige of his name and not to his political acumen. Leopold's actual comparison between Wellington and the adherents of the Manchester School of politics was equally unhappy and inappropriate, for apart from the incongruity of contrasting an aristocratic war veteran with a young middle-class body of radical opinion, the future was to show that, although the military qualities and good fortune of the Duke certainly helped to make England victorious in a vital and arduous war, the policy of the Manchester School was responsible for the immense increase in the wealth and prosperity of this country through many decades of almost uninterrupted peace.

Almost contemporary with the Duke's death, the Queen was the recipient of an unexpected fortune, which greatly delighted her Uncle Leopold. A bizarre and parsimonious old bachelor called Neild left her on his death the whole of his estate, amounting to half a million pounds. Victoria at first showed a commendable reluctance to take this legacy to which she had no conceivable claim, but on being assured that Mr. Neild possessed no known relatives, she accepted the money and, as a gesture of gratitude, she inserted a stained-glass window, *in piam memoriam* of the loyal miser in his parish church of North Marston, in Buckingham. In his letter of congratulation to the Queen on this happy event, Leopold pointed out to his niece the opportunity she now possessed of forming a private fortune for the Royal Family, "the necessity of which nobody can deny," and he concluded with the sad reflection that "such things only still happen in England, where there exists loyalty and strong affection for Royalty, a feeling, unfortunately, much diminished on the Continent of Europe."

Two months after the Queen's windfall and Leopold's

aphorisms on the death of Wellington, Victoria, on November 23rd, wrote to her uncle an enthusiastic account of the impressive ceremony of the Duke's funeral. She was delighted, she said, when assured by foreigners, that they never could have believed that such a multitude of people could have shown "such feeling, such respect, for not a sound was heard! I cannot say what a deep and *wehmüthige* impression it made on me! It was a beautiful sight. In the Cathedral it was much more touching still! The dear old Duke! He is an irreparable loss!" Earlier in the same letter, the Queen referred to the pompous panegyric which Disraeli, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, had delivered on the Duke's death, a large part of which he had taken, without acknowledgment and most inappropriately, from a eulogy by Thiers on a French Field-Marshal. This impertinent ruse was, unfortunately for Disraeli, instantly discovered and exposed by the *Globe* the following day. Amidst the general laughter caused by the Chancellor's discomfiture, the Queen took a firmer line and remarked to her uncle: "Disraeli has been imprudent and blundering", an interesting affirmation in view of her later uncritical devotion.

The year closed with a further calamity for the Queen. Lord Derby fell and, in the new Government formed by Lord Aberdeen, Palmerston returned to office as Home Secretary. His return to power, inevitable owing to his immense popularity in the country, was naturally a most bitter pill for Victoria to swallow but, with the aid of the Prince Consort, she succeeded in preventing his return to the Foreign Office. She was also somewhat consoled for the unwelcome come-back of her old adversary by the delicate state of his health, of which she related to her uncle the following particulars on the last day of the year: "Lord Palmerston is terribly altered, and all his friends think him breaking. He walks with two sticks and seemed in great suffering at the Council, I thought. I must now conclude . . ." The Queen was too honest to express a pity she was temperamentally incapable of feeling for the sorrows or sufferings of her enemies.

The end of the year found Leopold in a depressed state of mind. Political affairs in Belgium had passed through

a crisis, as the Liberal Government had been overthrown and, after many difficulties, a so-called Ministry of Conciliation had been formed. The King, as ever, was much exasperated by the pettiness and unimportance attached to the internal politics of his Kingdom, and writing to his niece, talked of "leaving the premises." The Queen, in an indignant reply, informed her uncle that his "affectionate child" would never allow even the mention of such a proposal. She reminded him how sacred duties of any kind were, above all, those of a King, and added firmly: "You know—too well . . . how impossible it is for us to shirk or abandon any of those duties which God has imposed on us."

No doubt this mood was momentary, and anyhow the new year provided Leopold with two enthralling marriages, events always dear to the King's heart, while these were of particular interest as concerning his own eldest son Leopold, as well as the Emperor of the French. The latter came first in priority and naturally attracted universal attention, but previous to the actual marriage of Napoleon III with his Spanish bride, an elaborate intrigue had centred round the person of Princess Adelaide of Hohenlohe, the daughter of Victoria's half-sister Feodora, and in consequence a niece of the Queen and a great-niece of King Leopold.

As soon as Louis Napoleon had become Emperor of the French, "by the Grace of God and the Will of the People," he began to search Europe for a suitable royal bride. None of the Catholic Royal Families felt inclined to provide a daughter for the bed of the Imperial upstart, and Napoleon felt injured when his first endeavour to secure a Princess, in this case from the house of the Spanish Bourbons, proved futile. The Emperor then began a tentative enquiry for the hand of the Swedish Princess Caroline, daughter of Prince Gustavus of Wasa, who was the son of the last King of Sweden of the pre-Bernadotte dynasty. These negotiations, however, he suddenly abandoned, not without pressure on the part of the Tsar, in favour of an alliance with Princess Adelaide, with the object, according to Count Walewski, of strengthening the bonds of friendship between England and France.

This unexpected proposal on the part of the Emperor placed the Queen in a position of considerable difficulty. Privately, she was strongly opposed to the suggestion, both on religious and personal grounds, but she realised that her official disapproval would gravely prejudice her relations with Napoleon. On the other hand, in the Queen's opinion her acceptance of the proposal would have exposed her "to a share in the just opprobrium attaching in the eyes of all right-thinking men to the political acts perpetrated in France ever since December 2nd, 1851." Probably Victoria was more influenced in her point of view by the prospect of her niece "Ada" being forced to change her religion, in order to become Empress of the French, than by any real disgust at the unconstitutional behaviour of Louis Napoleon.

Both the Queen and her sister, Princess Hohenlohe, wished to decline the offer without taking into consideration, at all, the feelings of Princess Adelaide, and some alarm was caused in Coburg circles by King Leopold expressing the opinion that "Ada's" sentiments should be taken into account, before a direct refusal was made. Another disconcerting possibility occurred to Princess Hohenlohe, on which she hastened to consult her half-sister, Victoria. "If Ada has the wish to see the Emperor before she decided," she asked in trepidation, "what is to be done?" Fortunately "Ada" proved amenable to family direction, refrained from expressing the immodest desire to see the man who had asked for her hand, and in less than a month after the final decision to reject the brilliant proposal, the Emperor, deeply in love, had married the beautiful Spaniard, Eugenia de Montijo, a granddaughter of Mr. William Kirkpatrick, one time American Consul at Malaga.

In these delicate transactions the part played by Leopold was hesitating and ambiguous. Had the King given his influential support to the proposal that his great-niece "Ada" should marry the Emperor of the French, there is little doubt that the opposition of the Queen and her half-sister would have been turned into a reluctant consent, while the sentiments of the young Princess herself would, under those circumstances, have played no part in the King's calculations. Undoubtedly Leopold's attitude was

determined by his fear of the new Napoleonic regime and his distrust of its stability, otherwise he would not have hesitated to grasp a unique opportunity of re-establishing his influence in France. To have been in the singular position of great-uncle to the Emperor of the French, then a man of over forty, would have added new lustre to Leopold's family affairs.

April was a month of particular personal interest to both the Queen and her uncle. On the 4th, Victoria's fourth son was born, afterwards the Duke of Albany, and two days later Leopold's eldest son, the Duke of Brabant, celebrated his eighteenth birthday, and therefore, to his father's intense satisfaction, became of a marriageable age. The Queen decided, perhaps a little tardily, considering there had been three previous opportunities, that her new son should be called after her uncle. The manner, however, in which she announced her decision to the King was calculated to dispel any feelings of disappointment he might previously have entertained, although it is curious that the first intimation did not come from herself. "Stockmar will have told you that Leopold is to be the name of our fourth young gentleman," she wrote on April 18th. "It is a mark of love and affection which I hope you will not disapprove. It is a name which is the dearest to me after Albert, and one which recalls the almost only happy days of my sad childhood."

Certainly Leopold was gratified by this mark of attention, but all his energies were for the moment absorbed in the delicious occupation of finding his son a suitable bride. The possibilities were wide as Catholic Princesses were not scarce in those days, but the King decided that the House of Hapsburg should provide the future Queen of the Belgians. Politically his decision was short-sighted; from the personal aspect it proved a disaster for the bride, but to Leopold it appeared at the time the best means of strengthening the *status quo*, a vital condition of Belgian independence. The Empire, in the King's opinion, shone like a lone star of fixed stability in a sadly changing world. "Austria is the keystone of European policy," he once wrote, "its existence is essential to the European equilibrium."

England and France both greeted the announcement of the engagement of the Duke of Brabant to Marie Henriette, daughter of the Archduke Joseph, with marked frigidity. Austria, in the eyes of most Englishmen, was an objectionable and reactionary power, while in France the proposed alliance was considered to be a hostile gesture against the new regime, and the Emperor instructed his envoy in Brussels to absent himself from all celebrations connected with the betrothal.

Leopold, however, remained unmoved by the inimical attitude of English and French public opinion and, in May, took his son with him to Vienna to meet his future wife. The visit, as far as the elder Leopold was concerned, was a great success. He loved the grandeur and formality of the Viennese Court, where he was now at last received as a legitimate sovereign, and he was favourably impressed by the person of the young Emperor Francis Joseph. ". . . There is much sense and courage in his warm blue eyes," Leopold wrote to the Queen on his return to Laeken, "and it is not without a very amiable merriment when there is occasion for it." The King was also struck by the ease in which he stood out "in the *mêlée* of dancers and archdukes," particularly "as now at Vienna the dancing is also that general *mêlée* which renders waltzing most difficult." Leopold then turned to matters more important than the age-long complaint of overcrowded ballrooms and, referring to the projected alliance of his son with the young Archduchess, remarked: "I trust that this family connection may mitigate . . . the suspicions in Palmerston's time that it had become a plan of England to destroy the Austrian Empire." Unfortunately, neither the Queen nor her Government regarded the marriage of any family of political consequence to England, a fact which Leopold may have surmised, since he concluded his letter with a hint of displeasure: "About what is to be done by way of graciousness on your part we will consider. . . ."

Although his father was much gratified by his reception at the Imperial Court and the successful outcome of the visit, young Leopold regarded both Vienna and the person of Marie Henriette with equal unconcern. He neither

liked nor disliked the selected bride. He was also at that time far from well, suffering from weak lungs, inherited from his mother, and the inordinate sexual appetite, which he developed in later years, showed no indication of being aroused by the contemplation of his future wife. But the Duke of Brabant was completely under the control of his relentless father, and it no more crossed his mind to propose a bride of his own choice than it would have occurred to Leopold to consider his suggestion.

The little Archduchess Marie Henriette, who was lively, pretty and pious, although self-willed and uncontrolled, did not regard the prospect of marriage with such equanimity. She took an instant dislike to young Leopold, which was curious considering that his appearance as a boy was not unprepossessing, but perhaps she was antagonised by his youthless and hard manner, which augured ill for the future. Anyhow, her forebodings were rapidly and sadly justified, for after only four weeks of married life she wrote to an old friend : " My poor mother, dear angel, is beginning to understand what she has done. ... If God hears my prayers I shall not go on living much longer. . . . "

In this callous disregard of the feelings of two children of eighteen, Leopold was guilty of one of the most egotistical actions of his life. The misery for which he was responsible was not confined to the existence of his daughter-in-law, who was neglected and loathed by her husband all her life, but also affected their three daughters, two of whose lives were unrelieved tragedy. The more famous, Stephanie, married the Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria, who was found dead in the arms of his mistress, Baroness Mary Vetsera, at Mayerling, while Louise, the wife of Philip of Coburg, lived for many years a wild and drunken existence with the handsome Count Mattachich, later spending seven years in a Saxon lunatic asylum and eventually died in poverty and oblivion in a Belgian boarding-house during the Great War.

But perhaps of his son's later life, King Leopold I would have been proud. Certainly he would have condoned his amorous promiscuity, even his liaison with the dancer Cléo Mérode, nicknamed wittily enough, Cléopold,

although, owing to the notoriety, he would have frowned on the salacious connection between his successor, when a man of over seventy, and the wanton daughter of a French hall-porter, despite that illicit union being eventually regularised by a compassionate Church. Of his son's political actions, Leopold would have undoubtedly approved, particularly of his consummate skill in securing and exploiting the Belgian Congo, although he himself would certainly have avoided those later regrettable disclosures which proved his son to be responsible for the death of several million niggers in order to satisfy his lust for wealth and power. But the imagination which conceived that colossal plan, securing as his own private possession a country in area a million square miles, would have fired the first King of the Belgians with envy and admiration. "Forward to the Nile" was to be the inspiring motto of his son. From the beyond, the father could have joyfully exclaimed: "The Coburgs, by the grace of God, wear many crowns; for you He has reserved the throne of the Pharaohs!"

CHAPTER TEN

“The Englishman does not know what to be ‘froh’ means. When they laugh, it is to see a fellow-citizen torn to pieces.”

ALBERT TO LEOPOLD

THE Crimean War which, in so far as the principals Russia and Turkey were concerned, broke out in November, 1853, proved a mortifying episode for Leopold. His impotence to prevent it, his inability to participate in it, and his natural exclusion from the deliberations which terminated the conflict acutely irritated him, while the fact that the origin of the war was initially religious was an additional cause of exasperation to the King.

The negotiations preceding the outbreak of war were as intricate as its conduct was muddled and corrupt, while the necessity for England waging it at all, apart from the imagined designs of Russia on India, was far from clear to calm and enlightened contemporaries. The primary impetus was, of course, given by the Tsar, who, unscathed by the events of the Year of Revolution and elated by his success in helping to suppress the Hungarian rebellion, believed that his power and prestige would now enable him to annex the European dominions of the Sultan of Turkey. Opposition to his plans he did not greatly apprehend, Austria being then in his pocket and France endeavouring to accustom herself to the new imperial regime but, fearing that England might make difficulties, the Russian Government proposed to the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg that their respective countries should mutually benefit from the forthcoming dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Egypt and Crete were offered as the principal bait, but even so, the English Government did not respond.

Undeterred by this ingratitude, the Tsar proceeded to formulate his demands in Constantinople. The dispute between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches regarding the guardianship of the Holy Places, in particular the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, had for some time been in existence, with France as the protagonist of the former and Russia of the latter Communion, but in the spring of 1853, the Tsar added to his previous claim the demand that Russia should be granted by the Sublime Porte a protectorate over all its Christian subjects. The manner in which this ultimatum was delivered was dramatic and well calculated to overawe the Sultan, who was, as yet, unaware of the growing jealousy of Russia in western Europe. The Russian envoy, Prince Menschikoff, appeared before the Sultan and his Court, unconventionally garbed in day clothes and mud-stained top-boots and, after delivering his Tsar's ultimatum to the startled Abdul-Medjid, withdrew without ceremony.

This undiplomatic behaviour made a deep impression on the Sultan and his advisers, and it is likely that the Tsar would have obtained both his guardianship of the Holy Places, as well as an undefined and probably innocuous protectorate over the Christian Turks, had not at that critical moment Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, the British Envoy, intervened. This diplomat was undoubtedly the evil genius in the prolonged European negotiations, both in Constantinople and Vienna, which were initiated to prevent war, and it is curious to reflect, in an age when all Ambassadors are, by telephonic communication, at the mercy of the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, that with a less biased and better controlled representative than Lord Stratford, the Crimean War might have been indefinitely postponed. Lord Stratford was a violent Russo-phobe, like Lord Palmerston, both from caprice rather than from conviction, and his persistent and successful endeavours to persuade the Sultan to refuse all suggested settlements, clearly showed his desire to force Turkey into a war with Russia, in which England would be compelled to participate on the side of the former Power.

Lord Stratford's first intervention took place, as has

been stated, immediately after Prince Menschikoff's dual demand and, though an agreement was reached as to the guardianship of the Holy Places, the British Ambassador persuaded the Sultan to reject the Tsar's claim of a Russian protectorate over his Christian subjects. At this, Menschikoff instantly withdrew from Constantinople and Russian troops occupied the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, which now form the larger portions of modern Roumania. This drastic step was described by Russia not as an act of war, but as a material guarantee of her equitable demands.

The tension in western Europe was naturally increased as a result of the Tsar's bellicose behaviour, but there was, as yet, no apparent reason for either England or France to declare war against Russia. In England the Cabinet was divided: the Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen, had no confidence in Turkey, while Mr. Gladstone could perceive no moral obligation for England to support with arms that decaying empire. Lord Palmerston, on the other hand, was developing an increasing prejudice against Russia, an attitude in which he was recklessly encouraged by the mass of public opinion. The Court, however, was determined to prevent war with Russia.

In France opinion was divided on exactly opposite lines. The people had no interest in a war with Russia, a country which in no way threatened their interests, and even the most Catholic section was little moved by the refusal of the Porte to allow the Orthodox Tsar a protectorate over the Christians, particularly as the question of the Holy Places had been settled in a satisfactory manner. The Emperor, on the other hand, was extremely anxious for war. He was convinced that a military success was essential to his prestige, both at home and abroad, while a war, he hoped, would unite the divisions of his people and divert attention from internal affairs. In a somewhat embarrassing manner, however, he placed himself unreservedly in the hands of the English Government, having no intention of supporting Turkey alone, and astutely realising that, should England decide to fight Russia, she could hardly refuse an alliance with France, which, incited by the previous success of the Orleans in creating the Entente

Cordiale, he ardently desired to form, at the first opportunity.

The King of the Belgians, like his niece and nephew, wished at all costs to prevent war. Apart from his ever-present fear of an outbreak on the Continent, Leopold had little interest in the conflicting claims of Christian and infidel in the Ottoman Empire, nor did the Russian occupation of the Danubian Principalities appear to him to be an adequate reason to fling Europe into war. He had also recently received a highly complimentary letter from the Tsar, of which, with his quick susceptibility to flattery, he was inordinately proud.

The desire to prevent war being thus, on the whole, predominant in Europe, a further effort to preserve peace was made by the Powers in the early autumn. After protracted conversations, a general agreement was at length reached, and a document, known as the Vienna Note, to which England, Russia and France were parties, was presented to the Porte. The Note was moderate and conciliatory in tone and, for a moment it appeared as if war could be averted, but once more Lord Stratford de Redcliffe intervened to prevent peace, and persuaded the Sultan to reject the proposals. This act of folly was shortly followed by the Turkish ultimatum to Russia demanding the evacuation of the principalities, which, on rejection, precipitated the two nations into war.

The news of the outbreak of hostilities was as unwelcome at Windsor and Laeken as it was acclaimed at the Tuileries. The Emperor saw with delight his alliance with England drawing nearer, an alliance which Leopold longed to avert from motives of jealousy and personal dislike of Napoleon. The Queen, on her part, was not unnaturally greatly incensed by Lord Stratford's arrogant conduct, and she much resented his remark that war was the decree of fate and that England's wisest role would be to bring it to a thoroughly good conclusion. In a letter to Lord Aberdeen she angrily enquired whether Lord Stratford should be allowed any longer to remain in a position which gave him the means of frustrating all her efforts for peace. But Lord Stratford, like Lord Palmerston, represented the public opinion of England, which was growing more bellicose

against Russia every day, while the Court, in its attempts to prevent war, became the object of general suspicion.

The sudden and violent war-fever which swept through England in the autumn of 1853 cannot, in common with all insane fluctuations of public opinion, be wholly explained, although, no doubt, the growing liberal tendencies of the middle classes, whose feelings had been outraged by the tyranny and recent excesses of the Tsar's Government, were the primary cause of the almost universal demand for war. In a lesser degree, the exiled Hungarian rebel, Kossuth, banished from his country two years before and recently engaged in addressing protest meetings in England, describing Russian brutality in the Hungarian rebellion, had considerably inflamed public opinion, while Palmerston's refusal to be dictated to by the Queen as to whether or not he might receive the Hungarian "Patriot" at his private residence, had immeasurably increased the popularity of both men. Indeed, only some sensational incident was needed to crystallise general discontent into a formidable opposition against the Queen and her Government, and the necessary stimulus was supplied on November 30th, when the Turkish fleet was destroyed by the Russians in Sinope harbour.

This "Massacre" of Sinope, as it was egregiously termed by the English public, shortly followed the arrival of the British and French Fleets in the Dardanelles, a foolish action on the part of the Governments concerned, which inevitably appeared more as a defiance of Russia than as a support of the small and feeble navy of the Porte. The reactions of the general public to this Turkish disaster were wide and impetuous, and the rumoured and probably calculated resignation of Lord Palmerston on December 16th, who was well known to be in a chronic state of opposition to the Queen, convinced the public that the Court was pro-Russian and had betrayed the interests of England. Even the withdrawal of "Pam's" resignation a few days later did not calm the agitation, and it was generally asserted and believed that the King of the Belgians had persuaded his niece and nephew to abandon Turkey to the tender mercies of the Tsar. A wild rumour

also circulated in London that the Prince Consort had been arrested for treason, and a vast concourse of people assembled to watch his anticipated arrival at the Tower.

The madness passed, and Albert's conduct was vindicated in Parliament, but it left Leopold thoroughly alarmed by the manifest distrust of himself and the Coburgs in England; sentiments which he knew were echoed in France. These events, however, strengthened by the conviction that England and France were now almost certain to form an alliance against Russia, induced Leopold to make a more determined attempt to become on better terms with Napoleon, whose power and stability he was now reluctantly compelled to admit, with a view to safeguarding Belgian interests and, if possible, of moderating the Emperor's enthusiasm for war. Napoleon, on his part, was by no means averse from benefiting from Leopold's experience and influence at Windsor, and welcomed a visit at Paris from Prince Chimay, an intimate friend of the King.

Napoleon lost no time through the medium of the Prince of sounding Leopold on the possibility of a match between his cousin Jerome and Princess Mary of Cambridge, the mother of our present Queen, but his antipathy to the Emperor prevented Leopold from urging this marriage on Victoria. He was pleased, however, to receive Prince Jerome in Brussels, a visit which was returned in Paris by Leopold's nephew, Duke Ernest II of Coburg, the King at that time being unable to entertain the suggestion of visiting the Emperor in person. The young Duke was brilliantly fêted in Paris, being, in fact, the first foreign royalty of consequence to ask to be received by the Emperor of the French, and Leopold, feeling that, as a result of these amicable visits, his position in Europe had been considerably enhanced, decided on a determined though belated attempt to prevent war.

For this purpose the King chose the Emperor of Austria, who, although reluctant to join the Western Powers in an attack on Russia, was in a strong position to influence the truculent attitude of the Tsar. In a long letter, written in February, Leopold told the Emperor what a service he would be rendering to Russia if he could induce that country to refrain from a grave war. "Russia needs no

conquests," he wrote ; " the influence which it seeks to acquire in the East is already given to it by its position." He concluded this letter by his old device of arousing apprehension of a general revolutionary outbreak : " On every side war is regarded as the great means of bringing on revolution. Is it in the interest of Russia to open these sluices of abomination ? " Despite the King's appeal to the Emperor Francis Joseph to exercise a moderating influence over the Tsar, Austria, under the leadership of Count Buol, continued to follow a weak and vacillating policy, and her later nominal adherence to the Western Powers sowed the first seeds of disruption of the Holy Alliance, which bore fruit seventy years after in the tragic fall of both Empires.

At the same time as Leopold was making his belated attempt to enlist the services of the Emperor of Austria on the side of peace, he tried to discourage his niece from consenting to war. " The plot is thickening in every direction," he wrote early in January, " and we may expect a great confusion. The dear old Duke used to say, ' You cannot have a little war.' " At the end of this letter he made an irritated reference to the elections then in progress in Belgium : " I am much plagued also by little parliamentary nonsense of our own here, a storm in a bottle ; . . . and I cast a sly look at my beautiful villa on the Lake of Como, quite furnished. . . ." Nevertheless, a few days later he returned to his preoccupations with the Queen's affairs and defended himself from the attacks made against him in the English press. " Abuse is somewhat the staff of life in England," he complained, " but . . . I don't think they will be able to fix anything upon your faithful servant. I have done England at all times good services. . . ." He then ventured on a timely political reminder to his niece : " I hold a position of great geographical importance for England, just opposite the mouth of the Thames." He continued on a personal note : " Successes of vanity I am never fishing for in England nor anywhere else." The fact that his vanity had been so deeply wounded by the recent wild slanders on the Coburg family in England must atone for the King's brazen disregard of the truth.

But Leopold's courageous if egotistical efforts to preserve peace passed unheeded in England, where the Queen and the Prince Consort were now convinced that war with Russia was inevitable. It was a bitter blow for the King, who, now in the sixties, began to realise that his authority in Europe was no longer recognised as before. The younger generation which he had so carefully trained, Victoria and Albert, no longer heeded nor required his advice, and new figures, such as Louis Napoleon, had assumed a dangerous pre-eminence beyond his power to influence or control.

The die was cast. In February, 1854, the Russian Ambassador left London, and the next month, following the English ultimatum to the Tsar demanding the evacuation of the principalities, war was declared and an alliance formed between England and France. "Our beautiful Guards sail to-morrow," wrote the Queen to her uncle, but even so he did not relax his efforts for peace, and less than a month after the English declaration of war, Leopold wrote to his old confidant, the Archduke John of Austria, that they must both be prepared to seize the first opportunity to bring the disastrous war to an end. Indeed, with that ultimate object in view and, for the moment to increase his influence over the Emperor Napoleon, Leopold overcame his strong repugnance to personal contact with him, and, in early September, set off with the Duke of Brabant for Calais.

This meeting between Napoleon and Leopold must have been intensely interesting to those onlookers who knew the respective histories and the consequent strong antipathies of the two sovereigns; Leopold, who as a boy had longed to serve under the great Napoleon and, later had become a most determined enemy, now a helpless and embittered witness of his nephew's growing ascendancy, and the Emperor, suspicious and jealous of the King's wide influence, realising his inevitable hatred for the usurper on the throne of the Orleans, and he himself desiring but not daring to incorporate Belgium in his Empire. One point they had in common, the memory of the Emperor's mother, and curiously and appropriately enough the ship on which Napoleon awaited the arrival

of the King of the Belgians, was named the *Queen Hortense*. Was it by chance or design that the Emperor had chosen this vessel on which to receive his royal guest? At any rate, almost with his first words, Napoleon cordially thanked Leopold for his kindness to his mother in that tragic year of 1814. Then, to the King's intense pleasure, the Emperor asked him for a portrait to keep in his private room. The trip from Calais to Boulogne, where the army was encamped, was pleasant to both parties after these affecting preliminaries, and Leopold returned to Brussels, his vanity touched by his host's consideration and his distrust of the Emperor's ambitious designs leavened by reluctant admiration.

Shortly after this successful visit and, encouraged by his uncle's example in overcoming his hostility to Napoleon, the Prince Consort accepted an invitation from the Emperor to visit him at Boulogne with a view to consolidating the *entente cordiale*. Albert and Napoleon, both in experience and outlook, were most dissimilar men, but their frank interchange of opinions, followed by an enthusiastic letter from the Emperor to the Queen in extravagant praise of her beloved Albert, cemented the alliance between England and France.

Meanwhile, Leopold, after his vain exertions to prevent war and the strain of his visit to Calais, decided to withdraw for a while from European politics, in which he had recently played such an insignificant role, and retired for some time to his house on the Lake of Como. Even there he was not immune from the repercussions of the Crimean tragedy. Leopold detested war, both for its futility and barbarity, and his niece's rapturous descriptions of the sufferings of "our noble troops" were a sore trial to his unmilitary and peace-loving mentality. Shortly after the return to England of the first shipload of wounded soldiers, the Queen visited them and wrote the following macabre account to her uncle: "A most interesting and touching sight . . . such fine men and so brave and patient! So ready to go back and 'be at them again.' A great many of them, I am glad to say, will be able to remain in the service. Those who have lost their limbs cannot, of course. There were two poor boys of nineteen and twenty . . .

the one had lost his leg, quite high up . . . the other his poor arm so shot that it is perfectly useless. Both had smooth girls' faces ; these were in the Coldstreams, who certainly look the worst. . . . Among the Grenadiers there is one very sad object, shot dreadfully, a ball having gone in through the cheek and behind the nose and eye and out through the other side ! He is shockingly disfigured." The Queen concluded this gruesome description to Leopold with the ambiguous comment : " We could not have avoided sending the Guards ; it would have been their ruin if they had not gone. . . ."

On returning to his capital and active affairs, the King found there was little possibility of successful mediation to terminate the war. Austria, with his approval, had now taken the part of the Western Powers, although she cautiously limited her intervention to diplomatic pressure on the Empire. The death of the Tsar Nicholas in March, 1855, caused Leopold to hope that his successor, Alexander II, would be more amenable to peace proposals, but the reconstitution of the English Government with Lord Palmerston as Prime Minister, besides provoking the King for personal reasons, also showed that the Queen and her people were united in their determination to bring the war to a victorious conclusion.

The increasing friendliness between the English and French Courts also served to irritate and dishearten the King. In April the Emperor and the Empress of the French paid a state visit to London and were received with enthusiasm by the crowds and with curiosity and cordiality by the Queen, and any lingering antipathy which Victoria may have felt towards Napoleon was completely dispelled by the tact and courtesy of her imperial guests. Although, in her delightful account of the visit the Queen remarked pointedly to Leopold, " The Emperor spoke very amiably of you," and again, " This visit . . . will increase the friendly feelings of the Emperor towards my dear uncle," he could hardly have relished the further information that, " our great visit is past like a brilliant and most successful dream. . . ." Had Leopold, however, been able to read the memorandum written by the Queen after Napoleon and Eugénie had returned to Paris he would have been

even more disturbed by the realisation of the complete conquest the Emperor had won over his impressionable niece. In the course of this long panegyric, the Queen wrote that Napoleon was possessed of "indomitable courage, unflinching firmness of purpose, self-reliance, perseverance and great secrecy." She even compared him favourably with "poor" Louis Philippe, asserting that the Emperor would be incapable of the crafty actions of the bourgeois King. On one point alone Victoria was uncertain and slightly troubled. "How far he is actuated by a strong moral sense of right and wrong," she wrote, "is difficult to say. . . ." The Queen was also much impressed by the grace, elegance and sweetness of the Empress, and on her departure Victoria presented Eugénie with a bracelet containing a lock of the royal hair.

The King was forced to suffer his niece's ecstasies in silence, although he must have resented her lack of subtlety in thus burdening him with such a wealth of unwelcome news, particularly as a short time after the imperial visit Leopold was summoned to Windsor where no doubt he was regaled with an adequate supply of first-hand information. "La Corvée" (work demanded from a peasant by his superior), had been the expression used by Queen Louise-Marie to describe these frequent visits to Windsor or Osborne, on which Victoria was most insistent, often at most inconvenient times for the King. On this occasion "la Corvée" must have been more irksome than usual, for apart from the painful allusions to her imperial ally, the Queen was much preoccupied by the Siege of Sebastopol, and she admitted in a letter to Leopold just after his departure, that she must have been a "dull companion . . . silent, absent, stupid. . . ." Added to these disadvantages, Leopold also had to run the risk of catching scarlatina, then rampant at Osborne.

A month later the Queen and the Prince Consort paid their return visit to Paris. Although now resigned both to the *entente cordiale* and to the excited affection of his niece for her new friends, Leopold could not have appreciated her delirious letters from St. Cloud and, on her return, from Osborne, describing her magnificent reception in the French capital and the touching welcome she

received from Napoleon and Eugénie. Not only did she find the Emperor "very fascinating," but he also "spoke to us on all subjects, even the most delicate," presumably a reference to the exiled Orleans. On political matters she informed her startled uncle that "the complete union of the two countries is stamped and sealed in the most satisfactory and solid manner, for it is not only a union of the two governments . . . the two Sovereigns . . . it is that of the two nations!" At that wild assertion the impassionate and experienced Leopold could afford to smile. Unfortunate comparisons were again made by the Queen in these letters between Louis Philippe and Napoleon. "Everything is beautifully *monté* at Court . . . we are both much struck with the difference between this and the poor King's time, when the noise, confusion and bustle were great." But this did not surprise the Queen, for, on her first meeting with the Emperor, she had come to the conclusion that, in contrast with Louis Philippe, who was typically French, Napoleon was much more German in character.

The writing of these long and excited letters to her uncle did not, however, satisfy the Queen's enthusiasm for France, and she even found it necessary to molest the patient Stockmar with an account of her activities in Paris. She prefaced her letter to the Baron with the severe remark: "You continue to refuse to answer me, but I am not discouraged by it," and proceeded to prove the latter assertion by a lengthy description of her experiences and reactions during her "triumphant" ten days in France. The most interesting part of this letter is her romantic account of the visit to the tomb of Napoleon I, "before whose coffin I stood (by torchlight) at the arm of Napoleon III, now my dearest and nearest ally!" She also admitted to the Baron that Albert was considerably less impressed by the Emperor than herself, and confided to him the interesting piece of information that they had seen little of the "Dear Empress, who was all kindness and goodness . . . as for really and certainly very good reasons she must take great care of herself. . . ." To the Emperor himself, whom she addressed in the customary manner of sovereigns writing to one another, "Sire et mon chér Frère," she wrote an

affectionate and sincere letter, far more intimate than royal courtesies demanded, and she showed a touching assurance of his interest in her family affairs by a naïve reference to "le petit Arthur" (the Duke of Connaught), who "se promène avec son bonnet de police qui fait son bonheur et dont il ne veut pas se separer."

Besides Napoleon, Victoria made the acquaintance in the autumn of another ally, King Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia, who visited her at Windsor. This monarch, unlike the Emperor, made a far from agreeable impression on the Queen. Indeed, she seemed to have been almost frightened by his uncouth appearance and behaviour. He was "wild and extravagant," she wrote to Uncle Leopold, "with a very strange, short, rough manner. . . ." To Victoria he appeared "more like a knight or king of the Middle Ages than anything one knows nowadays."

Although an ally, Victor Emmanuel obviously had no success at Windsor, but the confidence established between the English and French sovereigns, as a result of their exchange of visits, however distasteful to Leopold, was reflected in the Crimea in a relative unity of military objectives, which resulted on September 8th in the fall of Sebastopol, after a siege of three hundred and ninety-nine days. The news of this event, which heralded the victorious termination of the war, was received with intense relief and enthusiasm in London, while, at Balmoral where, curiously enough the Queen had occupied her new house the day preceding the surrender, the Prince Consort celebrated the occasion in a wild and singular manner. According to his own account, he actually joined with the excited Scotsmen round the bonfire "in a veritable witch's dance, supported by whiskey."

Albert's abandoned exhibition of joy was not imitated in Brussels, where Leopold was awaiting with grave concern the deliberations which were to follow the end of the war. Inevitably the King had thrown out a hint that Brussels would be a suitable capital for the Peace Conference but, when this was ignored, he eagerly supported Count Buol's demand that it should be held in Vienna. Paris, in the King's judgment, had to be avoided at all costs.

Leopold's attitude towards Austria at this time showed an ardent but pathetic reliance on that discredited and weakening power. He had married his son to an Archduchess, he was already scheming to marry his Charlotte to an Archduke and, in his opinion, the Empire alone had obtained the object of the war, the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and that, without shedding a drop of Austrian blood. The true position of the Empire in Europe he was unable to comprehend for, age was beginning to dull his perceptions to one obvious outcome of the Crimean War; that Austria by her shilly-shallying behaviour during its progress had completely lost the sympathies of all the Great Powers. The desire for a final and clear-cut decision in all mental and physical problems is prevalent in most old men; Leopold, in his decline, by his refusal to face the new facts about Austria, was unconsciously suffering from a finality complex.

Naturally, under the circumstances, Vienna was not chosen for the Peace Conference. The prestige of Napoleon made Paris inevitable. There, a settlement was reached which included the integrity of Turkey, the neutralisation of the Black Sea, no European protectorate over the Sultan's Christian subjects and the continuation of the Danubian Principalities under the Sublime Porte. All these matters seemed of small consequence to Leopold compared with the accomplished fact of the rupture of the Holy Alliance. Austria, no longer the pivot of that alliance, was now openly despised by the Northern Powers.

The immense authority and pre-eminence now enjoyed by the Emperor Napoleon, supported by Palmerston's pronounced pro-French policy, caused Leopold the deepest concern and, once again, he confided to his niece his fears of a violation of Belgian neutrality. Naturally the King realised the possibility that the Emperor, in a case of general war, might inform the Belgian Government that she must declare herself either for or against France. In Leopold's opinion, a neutrality to be respected must be protected. The Queen, however, was far from sympathetic towards her uncle's suggestion that he might be forced to break his neutrality, nor, on this occasion, did she sweeten the pill

by assurances of English support. In February she answered Leopold with little compromise: "I must repeat that I see no possibility or eventuality that could oblige you to do so. . . . I cannot at all see *how* you could even entertain the question, for . . . the basis of the existence of Belgium is her neutrality." Then the Queen became soft and human again. "The weather is so mild," she added, "that we should almost hope Stockmar would start soon. . . ."

Two events, which closely followed the termination of the Crimean War, provided Leopold with ample consolation for all the rebuffs and disappointments he had suffered during that disturbing time. They were family affairs of absorbing interest: the marriage of the Princess Royal of England to Prince Frederick William of Prussia and that of his own daughter Princess Charlotte to the Archduke Maximilian of Austria, for both of which alliances the King was primarily responsible. The young Prince of Prussia was naturally a great European *partie* and, as soon as it was known that he was desirous of finding an appropriate bride, Leopold immediately put forward the claims of his own daughter for that coveted position. Who could be more suitable than Princess Charlotte of Belgium, half Coburg, half Orleans, to be the future Queen of Prussia? Unfortunately King Frederick William IV, although already off his mental balance, thought otherwise. He had never much cared for his "brother", the King of the Belgians.

But Leopold would not acknowledge defeat. If Prince Frederick was to be denied to his daughter, he would work for the next best alternative, which was clearly the Princess Royal, his great-niece. Such a marriage, besides being gratifying to his family pride, might also be the prelude to an alliance between England and Prussia, for their mutual protection against his enemy Napoleon. Leopold sounded his niece on the matter. The Queen entirely agreed as to the propriety of the suggestion, but reminded her uncle that the Princess Royal was only fifteen and insisted that no thoughts of matrimony must be allowed to disturb her daughter's pious reflections before her coming Confirmation.

However, in September, young "Fritz" arrived at Balmoral, and finding "Vicky so *allerliebste*, he could delay no longer in making this proposal." The proposal was, of course, one of matrimony, but naturally it was not made to "Vicky" herself, but to her parents. The Queen wrote a charming description in her journal of "Fritz" courting of the juvenile Princess Royal; "... during our ride up Craig-Na-Ban this afternoon, he picked a piece of white heather (the emblem of 'good luck') which he gave her; and this enabled him to make an allusion to his hopes and wishes . . . which led to this happy conclusion."

Two years later, Leopold's hopes regarding his great-niece were realised, and the Princess Royal was married to the future King of Prussia, and as it turned out, the future second Emperor of Germany. The arrangements for the marriage had, however, led to considerable unpleasantness between the King's niece and the Prussian Royal Family, as the latter had the temerity to suggest that the marriage should take place in Berlin. The Queen was naturally flabbergasted by the preposterous suggestion and wrote angrily to Lord Clarendon that: "whatever may be the usual practice of Prussian Princes . . . it is not every day that one marries the eldest daughter of the Queen of England. The question, therefore, must be considered as settled and closed." Although the Prussian Court hastened to withdraw the audacious proposal, there were many Germans who resented the marriage of their future King to the Princess Royal, owing to the liberal opinions of the English Court. Of these, Bismarck was the most articulate and, in his condemnation of the marriage, he also cynically exposed a well-known weakness of the German character: "Every Berliner feels exalted when a real English jockey . . . speaks to him," he wrote; "and it gives him an opportunity of breaking the Queen's English on a wheel. What will it be like when the first lady in the land is an Englishwoman?" The future Chancellor could never have envisaged the life of suffering and humiliation that "English woman" was destined to lead in Germany, although "Vicky" could hardly have entered into marriage under happier auspices since, at the

altar, she was attended on the one side by her father and on the other by her great-uncle Leopold.

But the tragic sequence of events which were to embitter the life of the Princess Royal were almost trivial compared to the cruel misfortune which was to dog the footsteps of his daughter Charlotte, after her marriage to the Archduke Maximilian, brother of the Emperor Francis Joseph. Leopold, from the first, had been keen on this match, another link with his beloved Austria, and his niece, in the summer of 1856, had welcomed her uncle's earliest intimation of the proposed alliance. But two months later the Queen had changed her mind and strongly urged on Leopold that "dear Pedro should be preferred," the King of Portugal and a great-nephew of the King. Leopold agreed cordially with his niece, but he added that unfortunately the Archduke had made a favourable impression on his daughter and that he was determined to allow her to marry the man of her choice. This clumsy subterfuge did not deceive the Queen, who, realising that her uncle preferred the Hapsburgs to the Braganzas, wrote another vigorous letter to Leopold on Pedro's behalf. After drawing his attention to the profligate and worthless character of Austrian society, Victoria pointed out to her uncle that King Pedro was "full of resource . . . fond of music, fond of drawing, of languages, of Natural History, in all of which Charlotte would suit him." She concluded her letter with the strongest recommendation of all: "I would give any of my own daughters to him were he not a Catholic."

Leopold was worried by his niece's opposition, but remembering her susceptibility to manly charms, he arranged for the golden-bearded Maximilian to visit the Queen. As he had anticipated, Victoria gracefully capitulated; she found the Archduke so "charming, so clever, natural, kind and amiable, so English in his feelings. . . ." The marriage of Charlotte and Maximilian took place in July, 1857, attended by the Prince Consort, and the Queen, writing from Osborne, informed her uncle that to celebrate the occasion she had ordered wine for her servants and grog for the sailors on the yacht. "At this very moment," she wrote ecstatically, the "*knot*

is being tied which binds your sweet loving child to a thoroughly worthy husband. . . . I wish I could be present . . . but my dearest *half* being there makes me feel as if I were there myself." Few unions, royal or otherwise, which started under such brilliant and happy auspices, can have brought such pitiless consequences for both husband and wife.

Another proposed marriage about this time caused the Queen and her uncle considerable speculation. King Victor Emmanuel lost his wife during the Crimean War, and wishing to consolidate his alliance with England, which had drawn European attention to his somewhat obscure Kingdom, he asked for the hand of the Queen's first cousin, Princess Mary of Cambridge. The proposal caused a considerable stir in Coburg circles, as it was promptly felt that an English Queen of Sardinia would prove a useful weapon in moderating the King's warlike intentions against Austria. The religious barrier, however, had to be overcome, and the matter being left entirely in the hands of the Princess by the Queen, she decided to decline the King's offer on religious grounds ; a decision which, in Victoria's opinion, " does dear Mary the greatest credit." It is interesting, however, to remember that had the Princess thought otherwise, the mother of our present Queen Mary would have become the Queen of Sardinia and later of United Italy.

During these delightful months, when Leopold was negotiating the marriages of " Vicky " and Charlotte, he received from the hands of his subjects the most loyal and enthusiastic welcome, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his rule, and of the formation of the Belgian Kingdom. On July 21st, 1856, the King, accompanied by his two sons, rode from the Palace of Laeken to the Place Royale, where, outside the Church of St. Jacques, he was greeted by all the survivors of the original National Assembly. Chief amongst them stood M. de Gerlache, the patriot, who, twenty-five years before, at the same place and on the same day, had offered to Leopold the crown of Belgium with the words : " Sire, montez au trône." On this occasion the veteran statesman had more to say, but he finished a long discourse with these appropriate words : " Sire c'est

la voix du peuple qui sent le besoin d'exprimer sa gratitude à celui qui, après Dieu, a le plus contribué à la rendre heureux." M. de Gerlache was speaking the truth and naturally Leopold agreed ; had he not himself confessed his close relationship with the Almighty when he admitted : " Politically, I have worked for God " ?

A fortnight previous to these enthusiastic demonstrations, Leopold had paid a visit to England where at Aldershot, he had the pleasure of witnessing, by the side of his niece, a great review of the troops, lately returned from the Crimea. During this visit he had asked the Queen's permission to bestow a decoration on Lord Westmorland, a personal friend of his. To this request his niece gladly consented but, on his return to Brussels, he was greatly annoyed to receive a letter from the Queen informing him that her Ministers were opposed to the bestowal of this decoration and that, therefore, the matter would have to be dropped. Leopold however, was not prepared to take this snub lying down and, in his reply, after proving to his own satisfaction that there was ample precedent for his decorating Lord Westmorland, remarked with extreme acerbity : " . . . during the next fifty years of your glorious reign . . . you may get all sorts of things . . . but you cannot, either by the power of heaven or of earth, get a new uncle, who has kept his word for twenty-five years." Wisely the Queen ignored this outburst and, in her next letter merely begged her uncle to send her a fresh supply of her favourite cakes, " as I am not a very good breakfast eater . . . I miss them much." Leopold's displeasure with his niece did not, however, prevent him, in hasty imitation of Napoleon, from offering two Belgian regiments to assist her in suppressing the Indian Mutiny ; a somewhat unlucky offer, which was, not unnaturally, declined.

The happy relations existing between Leopold and his subjects, so much in evidence during the Jubilee festivities, did not, unfortunately, prevent them from quarrelling bitterly among themselves and, the following year Brussels was the scene of violent disorder, unknown in that peaceful city since the anti-Orangist riots more than twenty years before. The cause of the dissatisfaction was the Charities Bill, brought in by the Catholic statesman M. Decker, which



Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Kent in St. George's Chapel, 1837.

By J Isaac

"To hear dear Uncle Leopold speak on any subject, is like reading a highly instructive book"

The Queen, when Princess Victoria, in her diary.

proposed exempting from taxation, bequests to religious and charitable institutions. This possibly unfair, but most unvital proposal caused a wave of unprecedented anti-Catholic feeling to sweep through one of the most Catholic countries in Europe. The lives of Conservative deputies were in peril, the Nuncio was insulted in the streets, convents were attacked, and even the harmless Sisters of Charity were molested by passers-by. It appeared that a spirit of wild anarchy, rather than an anti-clerical or Catholic movement, had for a time possessed the pious and emotional Belgians. The King was furious. Disorder in his capital he would not for a moment permit. "I will myself take horse," he announced, "to defend the representatives of the people." He had done it before, in 1834, and he was quite ready to do it again. Leopold was not in the least afraid of his people. He was not, however, compelled to carry out his threat, since the Charities Bill was hurriedly withdrawn, the legislature closed and the General Election returned a Liberal Government, which remained in power under M. Rogier for the rest of the King's life.

The year 1857 closed with a great sorrow for Leopold as well as for his niece, who at the time was deeply distressed by the horrors and uncertainties of the Indian Mutiny. Early in November, Victoria, Duchess of Nemours, the King's niece and the Queen's cousin and intimate friend, unexpectedly died at the age of thirty-five. Ten days before, she had given birth and appeared in excellent health, when, one morning, in the words of the Queen, "having her hair combed, she suddenly exclaimed to the nurse, 'Oh! Mon Dieu, Madame,' . . . her head fell on one side . . . and before the Duke could run upstairs her hand was cold." The Duchess died at Claremont, also after child-birth, and exactly five days later than Princess Charlotte had died there forty years before.

The New Year opened for Victoria and Leopold with a dangerous episode. On January 14th, the Emperor and Empress of the French had arrived at the entrance to the Opera House when explosive hand-grenades were thrown at their carriage, which killed ten people and wounded another hundred and fifty. Napoleon and

Eugénie escaped miraculously with their lives, but the armour-plated carriage, which had been especially made for the protection of Louis Philippe, was completely wrecked. The sensation caused was naturally immense and, when it was discovered that the chief assassin, Felice Orsini, and his accomplices had come from London, where the plot to kill the Emperor had been prepared, the French army and Press broke into a chorus of angry threats against England. Count Walewski, the Foreign Secretary, added fuel to the flames by the impertinent tone of his notes to the English Government and the Queen, much excited by the commotion, credulously believed, that the reason for the attempted assassination was Napoleon's alleged breach of his oath to the Carbonari Club of Italy, to which he belonged, and that he had promised to pardon Orsini if he could now be released from this secret pledge.

Naturally, Leopold was little moved by his niece's wild surmises, and although possibly he may have been secretly disappointed at Orsini's failure to kill Napoleon, he was much gratified by the sudden coolness in the relations between England and France as the result of the outrage. Neither the Queen nor her Government, however, had any intention of allowing such a fortuitous incident permanently to impair the Entente with the Emperor of the French, and it was arranged that in the coming August, she and the Prince Consort should visit Napoleon and Eugénie at Cherbourg.

As soon as Leopold heard of this decision, he wrote a most critical letter to his niece, pointing out that, although the French might be kind to her personally, as a nation they cordially disliked the English, and insisting on the paramount necessity for the Queen to possess an infinitely superior navy to the French. Despite this discouragement from her uncle, Victoria and Albert, accompanied by the Prince of Wales, paid their visit to Napoleon on August 4th, but although the meeting was a brilliant personal success, the relations between England and France were destined to deteriorate in a short time. Immediately after her visit to Napoleon, Victoria went to her uncle. Perhaps she had a guilty conscience.

In other respects the relations between the Queen and

Leopold remained serene during 1858, and Victoria felt her position sufficiently strong in the Belgian Royal Family to write to the young Duchess of Brabant, who had just given birth to a daughter, telling her to give up nursing her baby, as "we Princesses have other duties to perform." In her own family circle, as well, the Queen was not without her worries, as the Prince Consort was low and depressed.

"Never relax," was beginning to tell, even on that strong constitution and indefatigable brain. To cheer him on his birthday, Victoria presented her Consort with a ponderous paper weight, composed of Balmoral granite and deers' teeth, designed by the Princess Royal.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"I feel like a poor hunted hare, like a child that has lost its mother, and so lost, so frightened and helpless."

VICTORIA TO LEOPOLD

DURING the course of this year, 1858, Leopold was so fortunate as to discover a new correspondent in the person of Mr. Disraeli, then Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Derby's Government. Like all men of discernment, "Dizzy" had the highest opinion of the King's capabilities. "He is the wisest Prince in Europe," he once wrote with truth to a friend: "natural abilities and great experience." The Chancellor then added the interesting information: "He proposed that we should in future maintain together a confidential correspondence." Leopold showed his discrimination in choosing the rising Jew for his various confidences, and he began their correspondence in a typical manner by attempting to excite Disraeli's apprehensions with regard to Napoleon. "We must take care," he wrote this year, "that 'Rule Britannia' does not become an old song." No doubt the "we" must have amused the Chancellor, who was as nimble at flattering the uncle as the niece. Two years later, discussing Napoleon's intentions towards Italy, Disraeli wrote these honeyed words: "At present if all is dark and perplexing to Your Majesty, what must it be to me?"

Besides the pleasure of forming a new friendship with the English Chancellor, Leopold, this year, enjoyed the intense satisfaction of being invited by his niece to make preliminary suggestions of a suitable bride for the Prince of Wales, then seventeen years of age. Accordingly, with great care, he drew up a list containing the names of seven desirable Princesses; six were German, the seventh,

Princess Alexandra, a Dane. Although this Princess was only fifth on the list, in order of precedence, Leopold preferred her to the others and, in consequence, she became the favourite at Windsor. Why the King should have selected a Danish Princess in preference to six Princesses of his own blood, has remained a mystery. His relations with Germany at that time were excellent, particularly on account of "Vicky," with Prussia, where the year closed with the abdication of the mad King Frederick William IV, who had become totally insane, and with the installation of his brother, Prince William, as Regent. Another item of less importance, but of general interest at that time in Germany, was the growing eccentricity of the Queen of Hanover. On one occasion, at an important evening reception, where everybody was "en grande tenue," Her Majesty arrived, to the general horror, in a small round hat with a lilac feather.

The year 1859 witnessed the emergence of almost the last, but also one of the gravest international problems in Leopold's life, as King of the Belgians. Not that it affected Belgium directly, only a general European war could by then have endangered her security, but since the outcome was a Napoleonic victory, Leopold had to suffer both resentment and defeat. With increasing years, the King's spleen against the Emperor became more pronounced until, in his ageing and embittered eyes, Napoleon III became vested with all the spectacular powers of a pantomime devil.

The plot was laid the previous year, in July, at Plombières. The conspirators were Napoleon and Cavour. The King of Sardinia wanted the help of the Emperor to "free Italy from the Alps to the Adriatic," and offered Nice and Savoy (the cradle of his race) as a bait to France. Napoleon agreed and the alliance was consolidated by the arrangement of a marriage between Princess Clothilde of Sardinia and Prince Napoleon, the son of Jerome, ex-King of Westphalia. To dissipate any doubts as to his intentions towards Austria, the Emperor remarked ominously to the Austrian Ambassador at the New Year reception in the Tuileries, that he regretted the relation between the French and Austrian Governments were not

more satisfactory, but added that this unfortunate fact did not, in any way, alter his feelings of friendship towards his brother Emperor.

This far from diplomatic and indeed injudicious utterance, although it was received with blind indifference in Austria, convinced Leopold that Napoleon was determined on his Italian war. The King was, in consequence, thrown into a state of considerable alarm and acute rage with the Emperor and his Sardinian ally. Cavour he referred to as *un homme abominable*, and he described Napoleon as a man with no moral sense, adding sententiously : "The fact is that he looks only to his own interest and pleasure," an attitude which nobody had adopted more successfully and thoroughly than Leopold. To the Queen he wrote in great agitation : ". . . Heaven knows what dance our Emperor Napoleon Troisième au nom will lead us. . . . I fear he is determined on that Italian war." He ended his letter on a note of self-pity : "For us poor people who find ourselves *aux premières loges*, these uncertainties are most unsatisfactory."

Apart from his general fear and hatred of war Leopold, on this occasion, was greatly incensed that the ground for hostility between Napoleon, Victor Emmanuel and the Austrian Emperor was the principle of the "self-determination of peoples," in Leopold's opinion, an even more insane and exasperating reason for war than the protection of Christian minorities, particularly as, in the present case, it served as a cloak to hide the sinister designs of the Emperor of the French on Europe in general. That Napoleon should have introduced this ridiculous principle into European politics was bad enough, apart from his dangerous determination to make it effective in Italy.

During the early part of 1859, Leopold left no stone unturned to awaken the dormant and complacent Government of Austria to a sense of its imminent dangers. To the King's constant appeal to Buol to effect a union between Austria and Prussia, the Count answered in general terms of agreement, but remained obtusely inert. Even Leopold's malign suggestion, that Russia might take a hand in humiliating Austria, left Count Buol unperturbed, probably because he realised that the King was trying to

bluff him into action, since Russia was still smarting from the Crimea and was unlikely to assist the Emperor of the French to win new victories.

This maddening inactivity of Count Buol drove Leopold to intervene personally with the Emperor Francis Joseph, to whom he suggested that Prussian susceptibilities might, with advantage, be borne in mind, since being the least important of the Great Powers she was naturally prone to take offence. The King added pointedly that the scheme to isolate Austria could only be countered by a good understanding with Prussia. The Emperor proved as obdurate as his Minister. Austria was still resting on the laurels of Olmutz. Almost in despair, Leopold in April recommended to Francis Joseph the familiar device of a conference. Unfortunately nobody wanted it except the King of the Belgians, least of all the Emperor of Austria, who knew he could not rely on the support of a single European power.

Leopold was compelled to own defeat. He realised now that nothing could prevent war, but he was flabbergasted by the ineptitude of Austria in gratuitously assuming the role of aggressor, for shortly after his last letter to the Emperor, urging a conference, Austria issued a curt ultimatum to Sardinia to disarm. The delighted Cavour naturally did not reply. In consequence, on April 29th, the Austrian army crossed the Ticino and thus started a war in which the Empire stood nothing to gain but everything to lose.

The Queen, officially impartial, although sharing with her subjects a growing apprehension of Napoleon's designs, was almost distraught at the folly of Austria. "God knows," she wrote to her uncle on May 3rd, "we are in a sad mess. The rashness of the Austrians is indeed a great mistake, for it has placed them in the wrong. Still, there is one universal feeling of anger at the conduct of France and of great suspicion." A week later she wrote: "What are the Austrians about? . . . They do nothing! . . . leaving the French to become stronger and more fit for the struggle every day!" However, it was some consolation for Leopold to know that his niece no longer referred to Napoleon as her "good ally."

The Queen was not exaggerating the folly of the Austrians in the early stages of the war. Not content with the initial diplomatic error of beginning hostilities, they took no advantage of their passage of the Ticino but waited inactively for the French troops to join forces with their Sardinian allies. The brilliant Radetzky was now dead and his successor, Count Gyulây, had apparently no recommendations, except his noble rank, to entitle him to lead the Austrian army.

Leopold, exasperated by the mismanagement of the Austrian troops, wrote direct to the Emperor Francis Joseph and gave him a quantity of strategical suggestions. "The main object must be to wear down the enemy's forces . . . the destruction of the enemy's fighting forces is the main thing," was some of Leopold's advice to the Emperor, as if he were responsible for a new military discovery and, in continuation, he informed his correspondent that the objective should be bombarded with artillery and if possible attacked in the rear. Excellent advice no doubt, even if somewhat obvious and bordering on the impertinent, but the Emperor contented himself with the airy reply that he hoped to show, by the results of his own strategy, how closely it was allied to Leopold's suggestions.

The King, however, did not content himself with supplying the Emperor of Austria with unasked-for strategical advice. Convinced that Napoleon was determined to regain the frontiers secured by France at the Treaty of Lunéville, he made another attempt to bring Prussia into the conflict as the ally of Austria. On this occasion, tired of the short-sighted Austrian Government, Leopold represented to the Prussian Envoy in Brussels that his country ought to concentrate their troops on the Rhine as a direct threat to Napoleon. This suggestion had many supporters in Berlin, including the Prince Regent himself, but unfortunately it had one extremely strong and able opponent in the person of the Prussian Ambassador at St. Petersburg, Herr von Bismarck. With consummate cunning and daring, Bismarck persuaded the Russian Government to send one of their armies to the frontier of East Prussia, in order to make Prussian intervention on the side of Austria appear impossible. Why should Prussia help Austria

after Olmutz? Austria and France had already begun to play Bismarck's game by mutual attrition, to secure for Prussia the hegemony of Europe.

The war in Italy did not last long, nor were the operations in any way distinguished except by the bravery of the troops. The ignorance and stupidity of Austrian Headquarters enabled the French Emperor and the King of Sardinia to enter Milan on June 8th, where they were enthusiastically received, after the Battle of Magenta, while, a fortnight later, the Austrians suffered another reverse at Solferino. These two battles, which were the only actions of importance, although neither were of a decisive character, were celebrated by the Parisian Modistes by the creation of two new dress colours, but although Magenta as a colour is better known than the battle after which it was named, Solferino pink, by its early eclipse, failed to perpetuate that battle in the popular memory.

Magenta and Solferino, which appeared to herald the ultimate collapse of the Austrian power in Northern Italy, to the general astonishment, concluded the war. On July 8th in a personal interview the two Emperors signed an armistice at Villafranca. The terms were as satisfactory to Napoleon as they were galling to Cavour, but deserted by his ally, he could not pursue the war against Austria single-handed. Certainly Sardinia was given nearly all Lombardy, including Milan; but Venetia, although comprised in a nebulous Italian Confederation, remained subject to Austrian rule. Obviously Italy was by no means "freed from the Alps to the Adriatic," nevertheless France in the following year obtained Nice and Savoy. It was a brilliant manœuvre on the part of Napoleon.

As a man of peace, Leopold no doubt must have rejoiced at the early termination of the second Austro-Italian war, although the Austrian humiliation and the Napoleonic triumph may have caused him to doubt the justice and wisdom of the Supreme Being. He must, however, have enjoyed some secret satisfaction at the real cause for its sudden conclusion. Discrediting the pious platitudes of the two Emperors on their mutual dislike of shedding blood, he realised that Napoleon had definite information

that Prussia, ignoring the advice and subterfuges of Bismarck, had decided to attack France, while the Emperor of Austria, in his jealousy, preferred to lose Lombardy than to risk the possibility of a Prussian victory over France after his own army had so signally failed against her. Moreover, the French Emperor, at that time at the height of his capabilities and prestige realised that, in the near future, he might need the assistance of Austria against Prussia although, when seven years later Austria required his, Napoleon did nothing. But he paid in full, since Sadowa was the precursor of Sedan.

But despite his cynical amusement at Napoleon's hasty conclusion of peace, Leopold had to face the disagreeable fact that the Emperor of the French had, by his victory in Italy, considerably increased his renown both at home and abroad, and the King, notwithstanding the assurances of England, was more than ever apprehensive that Napoleon, having with such comparatively little trouble extended the southern territories of France, might attempt to augment the northern ones as well by the annexation of Belgium. Had not Bismarck recently remarked: "Why does Napoleon look to Prussia for annexation rather than to something at his own frontier?" and had added with exasperating nonchalance: "England will make a row, but never go to war about it." Leopold realised that once more he would have to pocket his pride and beard the lion in his den.

Early in August, the King had been at Osborne, inciting the Queen as usual against Napoleon and, in the words of Louise-Marie fulfilling his customary "*Corvée*." But his projected meeting with the Emperor was far less agreeable. From Osborne he went to Ostend to join Napoleon and, not content with one interview, he journeyed to Biarritz three weeks later to meet the Emperor again. There he stayed a fortnight and dined with his host every other day. On both occasions, the Emperor treated him with respect and affability and, ignoring past or future politics, regaled the King with lengthy disquisitions on the military aspect of the late war. Realising that anything he said of interest to Leopold would be repeated to Austria, Napoleon harped on the good fortune he had enjoyed against the Imperial

army. He explained to the King how, after Magenta, his opponents would have defeated him had they continued the battle, while at Solferino, he was only saved by the lack of an Austrian reserve corps to strengthen the Emperor's centre. The Austrians, he pointed out a little venomously, had already defeated the Sardinians on their right wing. Napoleon was indeed particularly anxious to ingratiate himself with Francis Joseph and he hoped to achieve this object by vituperation of his late ally. The Sardinians, so he told Leopold, were vacillating in action and ungrateful in victory.

The King passed on the information to Vienna, as was expected of him, but he took little satisfaction in so doing, nor did he relish his interviews with Napoleon. On his return to Belgium in the late autumn Leopold suffered from an attack of dysentery which he insisted on calling a chill. His recovery was slow and painful. Worry and hard work had weakened his constitution; besides, the King was nearly seventy. In the early part of the new year, however, he received a letter from his niece which acted like a tonic on his jaded mind and body. Now at least he was certain that the Queen no longer regarded Napoleon as her ally, and shared with her uncle a complete mistrust of the Emperor. It was a great consolation for those rather awkward and fruitless visits to Ostend and Biarritz. "France," wrote the Queen in righteous indignation, "must needs disturb every quarter of the globe and try to make mischief and set everyone by the ears; and, of course, it will end some day in a regular crusade against the universal disturber of the world! It is really monstrous!"

Apart from European politics, two family affairs occurred in 1859 of considerable interest to both the Queen and her uncle. The first, in January, was the birth of Victoria's first grandson and Leopold's first great-great-nephew; Frederick William Victor Albert of Hohenzollern, the present ex-Kaiser William II of Germany. "Everything goes on beautifully," wrote the Queen to her uncle, "Vicky recovering as fast and well as I did, and the dear little boy improving so much and thriving in every way..." Victoria was deeply distressed that she could not attend

the christening. "I don't think I ever felt so bitterly disappointed about anything as about this!" and she continued with an assertion which seems strangely inappropriate to-day: "And then it is an occasion so gratifying to both Nations, which brings them so much together..."

The other family incident of mutual interest concerned Albert Edward, the Queen's eldest son, who, in February, was received by the Pope, and was in consequence the first Prince of Wales to visit the head of the Catholic Church since the Reformation. Victoria wrote to her uncle informing him that the interview had gone off remarkably well, and that Pius IX had been "extremely kind and gracious." She added reassuringly as a good Protestant that naturally the Prince's equerry, Colonel Bruce, was present at the interview, since "it would never have done to have let Bertie go alone, as they might hereafter have pretended, God knows! what Bertie had said..."

1860 was a tranquil year both for the Queen and her uncle. It seemed as if the tempo of their lives had been retarded to afford a contrast with the tragic climax of the following year. In European politics Italy had pride of place, but neither Victoria nor Leopold was implicated in the triumphs of Victor Emmanuel, who united that year in his Kingdom the greater part of Italy with the exception of Venice and Rome. The fact, however, that Napoleon should permit his ex-ally to annex practically the whole of the Papal States caused Leopold considerable astonishment, although he exaggerated the possibilities of the Emperor's unreliable attitude towards Pius IX when he wrote to his niece: "Now he puts the axe to the root of the whole Catholic Church by destroying the Pope." Despite Napoleon's complacency and Garibaldi's animosity, the Church survived.

Napoleon's attitude towards the Church naturally aroused little interest in England, but the fact that in March he actually obtained the annexation of Nice and Savoy caused great resentment, although the annexation, anyhow a personal arrangement between Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel, was fully justified by a plebiscite based on universal suffrage, which resulted in a large majority for France. However, John Bull, quite illogically, was now

thoroughly aroused and, by the summer, 130,000 volunteers had been enrolled, presumably with the object of fighting Napoleon on English soil.

Leopold was, of course, delighted by this complete reversal of sentiment in England towards the ally of the Crimean War, and eagerly accepted an invitation from his niece to visit her in June, with the object of attending a review in Hyde Park of some contingents of these volunteers. The unwonted spectacle of peaceful English citizens, dressed up as soldiers, under the impression that at any moment they might be called upon to repel an attack from his bogey Napoleon, must have been singularly stimulating for Leopold, but apparently it also served to increase his venom, since writing, on his return, to his niece, he referred to the Emperor with trite cynicism and an unforgivable pun as "that amiable, disinterested 'Annexander.'"

In Belgium, the year passed in political peace, the King celebrating the twenty-ninth anniversary of his accession with plaudits, which, although ever welcome, were now becoming a trifle stale. Leopold, surrounded by his family, visited all the principal towns of his Kingdom and received the homage of his loyal and grateful subjects. Family affairs were more interesting. The Queen now had another daughter on the marriage market, Princess Alice, aged nearly eighteen. But on this occasion it was the mother, and not the great-uncle, who discovered the suitable husband. In July the Queen wrote to Leopold that "our surmises respecting Louis of Hesse have turned out to be true . . . we have reason to hope that this affair will be in due time realised." The King was pleased, but not surprised. Louis had been in England at the time of Leopold's visit, and as a consequence, in his niece's words, "saw the first dawning of the prospects." Four months elapsed before the Queen again referred to the same subject. Then she wrote informing her uncle that "Louis was spoken to yesterday . . . by Albert . . . who told him he would have an opportunity of speaking to Alice." This opportunity "good Louis" was forced to take in neither private nor romantic circumstances, but "last night after dinner, when he was standing alone with her at the fire, and everyone else was occupied in talking."

Although it was her second daughter to become engaged, Victoria confessed to Leopold that she was "a good deal agitated and flurried by the whole event." Princess Alice's husband later became Louis IV, Grand Duke of Hesse Darmstadt, while, with melancholy precision, the Princess died at the age of thirty-five on the same day of the year as her father.

Contemporary with the excitement of Princess Alice's engagement, the Queen received the visits of the young Empress of Austria and of the French. Not that they came together, nor with the object of visiting the Queen. The Empress Elizabeth, requiring a change from conjugal and Court life, was on her way to Madeira in a ship placed at her disposal by Victoria, while the Empress Eugénie, who was in great affliction through the death of her beloved sister, the Duchess of Alba, intended to make a tour of England and Scotland for the sake of her health. Leopold was much interested in both visits, although his sympathies, quite unjustly, were more with Elizabeth than with Eugénie. Writing of the former, the King expressed to his niece the hope that she would make "a little excursion to Plymouth" to see the "young and very nice Empress of Austria," who, in Leopold's opinion, had "something very peculiar about her, which is very pleasing"; by which, no doubt, he meant that Elizabeth was an extremely seductive young woman. About the Empress of the French he was less enthusiastic, even unsympathetic: "Eugénie's expedition is most astonishing. She also coughs much," Leopold dryly informed his niece, denying to poor Eugénie her imperial rank, which he did not fail to accord whenever mentioning her sister Empress, and adding with truth and surprise: "I have never heard Scotland recommended for winter excursions." The Queen, however, did not share her Uncle's ill-feeling towards the Empress of the French and, when the latter was passing through London, Victoria paid her a visit at Claridge's Hotel.

The Princess Royal sounded in a minor key the tragic note, on which the year 1861 was destined to end. On New Year's Day the mad King of Prussia, Frederick William IV, died at Sans Souci. The Princess Royal was

present at his death-bed and, in a long and painful letter to her parents, she wrote: "I have seen death for the first time." Six weeks later the Queen celebrated the twenty-first anniversary of "our blessed marriage," which, she informed her uncle had brought them, and, "I may say, the world at large, such incalculable blessings."

A month later the first of the two great tragedies of the year befell the Queen. On March 16th her mother the Duchess of Kent died after an operation for an abscess on the arm. The Duchess was seventy-five, but her death was most sudden and unexpected. Although, since her marriage, and indeed from the day of her accession, when she instantly had her bed moved from her mother's room, and dismissed the doctor, Sir John Conroy, whose relations with the Duchess had sometimes verged on the intimate, the Queen had been both mentally and politically free from the influence of her mother, she had always retained for her a sentimental and respectful regard. Besides being her mother, was she not also the sister of Uncle Leopold and the aunt of her beloved Albert? The tactful seclusion in which the Duchess had lived had also greatly endeared her to Victoria and Albert and, now on her death, the Queen sincerely believed that her loss was irreparable and her letters to her uncle on the subject were worded with the customary exaggerated distress. As usual, she dwelt on her "Sehnsucht und Wehmuth" and on her consolation in weeping "which day after day is my welcome friend . . . my greatest relief." She also found an active outlet for her grief in going through her mother's drawers and presses and she wrote to her uncle telling him how touching it was "to find how she treasured up every little flower, every bit of hair." Amongst these relics the Queen found a lock of "Dear Princess Charlotte's" and also one instructive letter from Leopold, written in 1818, politely urging the Duke of Kent to marry his sister.

Another letter, written soon after the Duchess' death, threw an interesting light on the earlier life of herself and the Queen. It was written by the Prince Consort to his brother. "Mamma (the Duchess of Kent) here would never have fallen into the hands of Conroy," he remarked

in this letter, "if Uncle Leopold had taken the trouble to guide her." Not only was this statement a rare, if not unique, piece of criticism written by Albert about his uncle, but it also showed that Leopold had not interfered so thoroughly at Claremont and Kensington Palace as has been imagined. It is also probable that Leopold saw no reason why his sister, now widowed for the second time, should not enjoy some tender consolation from her doctor.

During the summer and early autumn there was relief from tragedy. The King of Sweden, Charles XV, and his brother Oscar, visited the Queen at Osborne. She found her guests "very French and very Italian!" and was much amused when, owing to some mistake, "the dress of the hohem Herrn only arrived at a quarter to nine and we only sat down to dinner at a quarter past nine!" Three days later she experienced a more poignant pleasure from a visit to "dear Frogmore and on the 17th we shall visit that dear grave!" . . . "Oh! the agony of Wehmuth, the bitterness of the blank, do not get better with time." A week after the visit to her mother's grave in the Mausoleum, "we placed wreaths upon the splendid granite sarcophagus and at its feet," the Queen was in Dublin, where she was most cordially received. Victoria, however, had little sympathy with her Irish subjects and in a letter to Leopold she ignored their kindly reception and after referring to a march played at a review, which happened to be one of her mother's favourites and "entirely upset me," she dismissed Irish affairs with a reference to the Viceroy: "Good Lord Carlisle is most kind and amiable, and so much beloved."

The interlude was over. In November a minor affliction prepared the way for the cruel calamity with which the year was to end. On the 11th, King Pedro V of Portugal, Leopold's great-nephew, died of typhoid, his brother Ferdinand having succumbed to the same complaint five days before. The Queen was, of course, much distressed and wrote to her uncle: "I hardly know how to write, for my head reels and swims, and my heart is very sore! . . . How the hand of death seems bent on pursuing that poor dear family! once so prosperous." Actually, the Queen was referring only to her relatives in Portugal,

she might well have extended her lament to the whole House of Coburg.

On November 26th, Victoria wrote to Leopold : " Albert is a little rheumatic, which is a plague . . . unberufen, unberufen, he is much better this winter than he was the preceding years." To the rheumatism had been added insomnia, probably intensified by the bad news from Portugal and by worries caused by the behaviour of his eldest son. A visit to Sandhurst in pouring rain on the 22nd, resulted in fever and weakness, and the Prince was confined to his room at Windsor Castle. A week later, Albert wrote his famous draft suggesting to the Foreign Secretary a more conciliatory tone in his reply to the Federal Government after the illegal seizure of the British steamer *Trent*, which not only was destined to be the last the Prince ever wrote, but in all probability prevented war, between England and the Northern States. When he brought this draft to the Queen for her signature he remarked : " I could hardly hold my pen."

Nevertheless, during the early part of December, the Queen continued to send optimistic reports of Albert's illness to her uncle. On the 4th, she wrote that her husband's rheumatism had turned out to be regular influenza, but she anticipated that, in two or three days he would be quite himself again. Five days later, she was compelled to admit that his recovery would be tedious, but she was not too worried to refer to politics and remarked, regarding the desire of the Northern States to escape from the consequences of their high-handed behaviour towards England : " The Americans may possibly get out of it."

On the 11th, the day on which the serious nature of the Prince Consort's illness was made known to the English public, Leopold wrote a soothing letter to his niece, full of good but somewhat platitudinous advice as to how invalids should be treated. " The great object must be to arrange all the little details exactly as the patient may wish them. . . . Patients are very different in their likings," he wrote and added a rare piece of self-revelation : " To the great horror of angelic Louise, the moment I am ill I become almost invisible, disliking to see anybody." Personal vanity and boredom with the company of poor

Louise-Marie may, however, have accounted for the King's insistence on "invisibility" when ill. The same day the Queen also wrote to her uncle, indeed he received a daily bulletin from her, again reporting well of her precious invalid and adding with truth but touching simplicity: ". . . I am well and I think really very courageous." She told Leopold as well that the Prince enjoyed having contemporary memoirs read aloud to him and added: "W. Scott is also read to him."

The following day the fever increased its grip on the weakening patient, despite the constant attention of Dr. Jenner, in the Queen's opinion, "the first fever Doctor in Europe." On the 13th, there was a rally and encouraging reports were brought hourly to the Queen during the night, but congestion of the lungs supervened next day towards the end of which the Prince Consort passed peacefully away. It was not until the last few hours that Victoria realised she was about to lose her beloved husband and then, kneeling by his bed, she whispered to the dying Prince her last pathetic words: "Es ist kleines Frauchen . . ."

The stream of wild and broken-hearted letters with which Leopold was inundated by his niece after Albert's death, the first, after her terrible bereavement, beginning: "My own Dearest, Kindest Father," only reveal her natural misery and passionate love and admiration for her dead husband. But even after the space of more than seventy years, they yet fill the reader with profound pity for the Queen's unmerited affliction and with the greatest respect for her determination to dedicate the remainder of her life to her family and Empire.

Leopold was naturally deeply distressed by the death of the Prince Consort. He had been fond of him, as far as he was capable of affection, he was also proud of the well-organised and brilliant nephew for whose mental equipment he and Stockmar had been jointly responsible and, above all, he realised that Albert's death might mean a disastrous weakening of his influence over the Queen. A particular sentence in one of her many effusions after her husband's death sounded a discordant note in the King's ears: "I am determined that no one person,"

she wrote, "may he be ever so good . . . is to lead or guide or dictate to me." Leopold arrived at Osborne on December 26th.

Since the early days at Claremont, thirty years before, never had the relations between Victoria and her uncle been so intimate and full of sentiment as they were during those sad winter days in the frigid gloom of mock-Palladian Osborne. Once more the King could be of real assistance to his niece, could really know what was going on inside and outside the Royal Household and, although he did not dare to trespass on her rigid conception of Albert's wishes, it was balm to be wanted and useful.

Leopold kept New Year's Day with the Queen, and according to her Journal this must have been a melancholy celebration: "Last year music woke us; little gifts, New Year's wishes, brought in by maid, and then given to dearest Albert . . ." but now: "Felt as if living in a dreadful dream. . . . Could hardly touch my breakfast." A small consolation was, however, provided for the Queen when she "went down to see the sketch for a statue of my beloved Albert in Highland dress."

On the 15th, Leopold went for a few days change to London. Buckingham Palace was placed at his disposal. There the King was taken ill and, for over a fortnight, he was confined to his room. His reflections during that time would have been interesting to know. Here he was living in a Palace which, but for the accident of Charlotte's death, would have been jointly his, thirty years before. Now, owing to another death, he was allowed there a brief reign of fourteen days. Charlotte and Albert . . . so far apart in years, in temperament, in circumstances, must for a while have been united in Leopold's complex and regretful meditations.

But although the King was ill, he was far from lazy. In particular he was full of advice to the Queen regarding Lord Palmerston, whom he was extremely anxious she should see as soon as possible, "that no appearance of coolness should exist," and in order that "Pilgerstein and his people should not be upset." He also told his niece that he had accepted an offer made by Palmerston who was at Broadlands, "to run up here and see me, which

may be useful to put things as you wish them to be." He arranged as well to interview the Prince of Wales, which may not have been easy, considering the anxiety he was rumoured to have caused his father during his last illness. However, "I saw Bertie yesterday at some length, and found him attentive."

In the manifold activities in which Leopold managed to indulge from his sick-room, he did not, however, forget that his nephew had only died a month before, and his business-like letters were in consequence dotted with pious allusions to the dead Prince. The appellation, "My beloved Angel," so often found in her letters and, one may presume, as frequently on the lips of the Queen, was adopted by Leopold, and "Our beloved Angel" became a prominent feature in the letters of the King. Although such an expression coming from Leopold hardly rang true, in one letter he summed up with little exaggeration Albert's character and achievements in a sentence worthy of record: ". . . What a master spirit had in view for the welfare and happiness of millions goes beyond the earthly successes, and connects itself with the great future of the immense creation." The Prince Consort never received a finer epitaph.

On February 1st, the fourteen days' reign in London came to an end and Leopold, far from well, went back to Osborne. Ten days later he returned to Belgium. But this visit to his niece, which had provided the King with such incongruous sensations; sorrow, regrets, contentment and pain, had strange repercussions in England. Without doubt Leopold was responsible for one salacious piece of gossip. In his suite he had brought a certain Frau Meyer von Eppinghoven, a lady of birth and distinction. In the past she had probably been the King's mistress, in London her sole function had been that of a nurse, but of that few were aware, since Leopold was determined that no one should know of his ailments. His personal vanity, his love of life for the sake of power, his fear of death, exaggerated by his lack of faith, made subterfuge in illness, in his case, inevitable. It is even related of the vain old monarch that, before receiving a visitor, and these were few during the last three years of his life, he would

rouge his face, darken his eyebrows and put on his "wind-swept" wig in a vain and pathetic attempt to disguise his age and infirmities.

For the same reason, his horror that the world should know he was ill, many wild stories found credence during this visit to England to account for the short time he spent with the Queen. The most remarkable, the basis of which may not have been an entire invention, related that, after the Prince Consort's death, Victoria was reading through his private correspondence when she found a mass of letters written by Leopold to her husband. Twice a week, according to this story, ever since Albert had married, uncle and nephew had indulged in this clandestine correspondence, in which Victoria discovered, to her grief, many painful allusions to herself. This, asserted the gossips, was the cause for the Queen's aloofness during her uncle's visit to Osborne. That Victoria may have found some critical references to herself amongst the private letters written by Leopold to his nephew is very possible, indeed in a frequent and intimate correspondence largely on family affairs, for over twenty years, it would be astonishing if all criticism were absent, but it is highly improbable that the Queen either felt or showed, during his Osborne visit, any coldness or bitterness towards her infirm and ageing uncle.

Back at Laeken, Leopold suffered greatly from stone during the following seven months. Indeed, his illness considerably increased in gravity and, throughout that time, it is said that he was forced to undergo as many as twenty painful operations for that malady. The King possessed a healthy dislike of doctors, who he was certain were only interested in robbing him by performing frequent and unnecessary operations and he preferred the soothing companionship of Frau Meyer to that of his family or friends. At one time during these months, Leopold was convinced that he was about to die and, with great delicacy and consideration, he compelled the reluctant Frau Meyer to leave him and to go to Wiesbaden, in case at his death, she might suffer at the hands of his family or public opinion. The King, however, was destined to live more than three years longer and, by the September of 1862, he had made a

remarkable and almost complete recovery from his painful illness.

The principal events of this year of international interest to the Queen and her uncle were the progress of the American War and the Revolution in Greece. The tension between England and the Northern States was relieved and, although no decisive actions were fought, the war, particularly on the sea, seemed to be going in the favour of the Southern or Confederate States. At this time it was generally believed that President Lincoln would be unable to subdue the Confederate armies and, in August, Mr. Gladstone, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in a political speech, expressed the opinion that Mr. Jefferson Davis, the President of the Southern States, had made a nation. Possibly the wish was father to the thought, since, as Leopold wrote to his niece a few months later, "the point of most vital importance to England is that there should be two great Republics instead of one, the more so as the South can never be manufacturing, and the North, on the contrary, is already so to a great extent, and actually in many markets a rival." The hopes of the King and Mr. Gladstone were not extinguished until the spring of 1865 when the military genius of Generals Sherman and Grant completely crushed the Confederate armies.

Of more family interest and also of considerable European importance was the Greek Revolution in the autumn of 1862. In October the Wittelsbach King Otto I was deposed by the Provisional and Revolutionary Government. Then, in the following December, with that strange fervour for England, which has often been evident in Greece, and for which, it is said, that Lord Byron was originally responsible, the National Assembly declared Prince Alfred, the Queen's second son, King of Greece, after an election based on universal suffrage, which had shown almost complete unanimity in favour of the young English Prince.

Although Victoria and Leopold could not fail to be flattered by this unexpected bouquet for the Coburgs, the former had no intention of allowing her son, then only eighteen years old, to accept the crown of such an unstable Kingdom, albeit her uncle may have entertained some

vague regrets that his great-nephew could not accept a throne which he had almost ascended thirty years before. A further and conclusive reason for refusing the Greek crown on behalf of her son was the convention of 1832, under which no member of the English, Russian or French Royal Families was eligible to accept it.

This inevitable disappointment did not prevent Leopold from scheming to place another Coburg on the throne of Greece, and his thoughts immediately turned to his nephew Ferdinand, who had been King Consort and later Regent in Portugal for his son King Pedro V, who had died the previous year. Ferdinand, however, as has been related, declined to abandon his mistress, Elise Hensler, for the throne of Greece, despite the beauty of the Levantine ladies, which Leopold had so improperly mentioned as an added inducement to his nephew to accept. The King, vexed by his refusal, then wrote censoriously of Ferdinand's conduct to the Queen and added rather pompously : " He is too much a *Lebemann*. At the end of life very little remains when you have lived but for that."

One Coburg had failed, but naturally there remained others. What reason existed, he asked his niece, to prevent another nephew, Duke Ernest II of Coburg, from becoming King of Greece ? Victoria agreed and so did " *Pilgerstein*," and the initial difficulty that Duke Ernest had no sons, and would therefore be succeeded in his Dukedom by Prince Alfred, was overcome by the proposal that the Queen's second son should be Regent in Coburg during his cousin's reign on the Greek throne. Naturally, the Greeks, who in Victoria's opinion were " very touchy and fanciful," would have resented sharing a sovereign with Coburg, and it must be remembered that the " *Hausgesetz* " of Coburg, by prohibiting its Duke from being the ruler of another country at the same time, prevented the Prince of Wales, although the eldest son of his father, from becoming his cousin's heir apparent in Coburg.

The removal of these preliminary and complicated difficulties, as well as, presumably, the agreement of young " *Affie* " to the proposal, proved all in vain since, after mature consideration, Duke Ernest declared that

nothing would induce him to become King of the Hellenes. Cajolery and indignation on the part of his Uncle Leopold were both equally futile. Duke Ernest preferred Coburg to Greece.

Despite this second reverse, the King was still determined to find a relation for this vacant throne, and after considering all the other eligible Princes of Coburg, he decided that a young man of seventeen, known in the Queen's correspondence as "Gusty," would make a suitable King. Again Victoria agreed; how could she fail to be enthusiastic about a prince who was a cousin of the "Beloved Angel," a great-nephew of Uncle Leopold and a grandson, through Princess Clementine, of Louis Philippe? Unfortunately, the candidature to the throne of Greece of Prince Augustus of Saxe-Coburg, whose only claim to renown was that his younger brother, Ferdinand, later became King of Bulgaria, was not seriously considered outside the members of the House of Coburg. Nevertheless, Leopold remained for some time his fervent partisan and, before he was compelled to admit ultimate defeat, he even offered to go to Greece as guardian to young "Gusty." This sincere though quixotic gesture on the part of the King, which showed his unwearied enterprise on his family's behalf, was treated by his niece with gentle admiration and she wrote to him kindly: "But we could never spare you." In March, 1863, Leopold's hopes of securing Greece for a Coburg Prince were finally crushed by the selection of Prince William, second brother of the Princess of Wales, to be King of the Hellenes. Although at his accession this Prince was only seventeen, he had a most successful reign of fifty years, dying in 1913.

The King's remarkable recovery from stone by September 1862, has already been related and, as a result of his restored health, the Queen arrived at Laeken on the 2nd, for a short visit. The object of this visit was not exclusively to see her uncle, but also to make the acquaintance of Princess Alexandra of Denmark or, still at that time, of Sonderburg-Glücksburg, who had been selected as her future daughter-in-law. Victoria was delighted with the Princess who had, in her opinion, "such a beautiful refined profile, and quiet lady-like manner," but she found the

interview with her parents, Prince and Princess Christian, a trial. Not only was the Princess very deaf, but neither she nor her husband had been smiled on by Albert, who had decreed, when giving his consent to the projected alliance between the Prince of Wales and their daughter : " We take the Princess, but not her relations."

Naturally, Leopold was delighted that these delicate arrangements should be made under his roof. They proved to his vanity and self-satisfaction that, although his international influence might be waning, he was as essential as ever in intimate family affairs. The Princess Alexandra had been chosen by him four years before as a suitable bride for his great-nephew and now she had been graciously accepted by the Queen. The fact that the Prince of Wales had not yet proposed nor the Princess evinced any known disposition to marry him, were matters of small consequence to Leopold.

The Queen did not stay long at Laeken. She did not find the company of Prince Christian and his wife particularly congenial and she confessed in her journal that during this visit to her uncle she had felt agitated, low and tired. Besides, she intended to visit Stockmar in Coburg, whom she had not seen since Albert's death. She looked forward to the prospect of their meeting with painful exhilaration.

Leopold was more active than ever after his niece's departure, which was shortly followed by the arrival at Laeken of " Bertie " himself. The previous arrangements had required thought ; a meeting between him and " Alix " in a German Cathedral, carefully organised, but seemingly by chance, had been followed by further contact, in a less restricting atmosphere, at Ostend. Now the Prince of Wales was summoned to Laeken by his great-uncle to make his formal proposal of marriage. Little pressure was needed on the part of Leopold. " Bertie " was healthy and susceptible and " Alix " of unusual beauty and charm. On the 9th, the Queen received a telegram from her son, in cipher, announcing that he had proposed and had been accepted and asking for the consent and blessing of his mother. Both were gladly given. Two days later, Victoria received an explanatory letter from her

uncle emphasising the fact that the Prince of Wales had married for love, "like his parents," and ending with the news that "Bertie" had asked to be allowed to stay on for a few days at Laeken, which "makes me very happy."

The Queen had received this letter from her uncle, at Coburg where she herself was also enjoying happiness, although of a more poignant and morbid nature. Apart from visiting the scenes of Albert's childhood at Rosenau, Victoria paid several visits to the Weber Gasse, where Stockmar was spending his last years. With the exception of the Queen, no one had felt Albert's death more deeply than the Baron. The Prince Consort, he considered, as his individual and immaculate creation, and although he always referred to Leopold as "his most gracious master," Albert, he regarded, as his son. On the death of his beloved pupil, he wrote : "An edifice, which for a great and noble purpose had been reared, with a devout sense of duty by twenty years of laborious toil has been shattered to its very foundations." "The edifice," presumably, was the character and abilities of the Prince Consort, of which, without doubt, the Baron had been the architect. He was, in consequence, the more responsible for its early and complete collapse.

But in the Weber Gasse, with copious and soothing tears, Victoria and Stockmar wept together over the busts, portraits and letters of Albert, of which the Baron had such an overwhelming collection. Afterwards, the Queen related how Stockmar said through his tears : "Oh ! my dear Prince, my good Prince ! How happy I shall be to see him again ! It will not be long before I do !" The Baron judged rightly, and while he and Victoria are happily engaged in their "Wehmuth und Schnsucht," his last years and death can be briefly recounted.

In the spring of 1857, Stockmar had left England for ever and, after the following year, he remained in Coburg until his death. The Prince Consort visited him once in 1859, and together with the Queen he came again the next year on their way to Potsdam to see their first grandson, while the Princess Royal and her husband paid frequent visits to the old family friend in the Weber Gasse.

On July 9th, 1863, Baron Stockmar died and his last hours, indeed his last years, according to one authority, could hardly have been more painfully spent in Hell. This authority, curiously enough, is the Countess Montmorency, *née* Caroline Bauer, and although her opinion of the Baron was, not unnaturally, somewhat jaundiced, after her experiences at Claremont and in Regent's Park, she was his first cousin and well acquainted with all the gossip of the Stockmars. It has already been related how the Baron treated his wife "Frau Fanny" whom he had married entirely for money, how he never once took her with him to Windsor or Laeken, which certainly ought to have shocked the Queen, and in fact totally neglected her for the sake of politics, which, his son Baron Ernest remarked with dutiful insincerity: "must have been a great sacrifice for so warm-hearted a man."

But, from 1857 to his death, "Frau Fanny" had her revenge. Parsimony had been her only relaxation during her many years of neglect and now she practised that failing with vituperative fury and satisfaction on her defenceless husband. Denied all comfort and kindness, even enough to eat, his sisters were forced to bring their aged brother the necessities of life. Just before his death, Stockmar wrote pathetically to "his gracious master": "I confess that I was not prepared for so comfortless an old age. Often, very often, I am near despair." But nothing could satiate "Frau Fanny's" thirst for revenge, and, according to Caroline Bauer, when Stockmar was dying, his brutal wife tore off his back his shirt and flannel jacket so that, after his death, the undertaker might not claim these garments, which were his rightful perquisites according to the customs of Coburg. Naked, he died from apoplexy.

If Caroline's lurid description of Stockmar's death and declining years is correct, his most bitter enemy could have been satisfied. For those, however, who can approach with prejudice the career of this remarkable and significant figure in the history of Europe of the first half of the nineteenth century, it is more relevant to remember that in the cemetery at Coburg, where he is buried, there stands an imposing monument in the form of an altar of grey

Carrara marble, supported by angels, with a fresco of the "Good Samaritan" below and the inscription: "Erected by his friends in the reigning houses of Belgium, Coburg, England and Prussia." "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." This monument was designed by the Princess Royal.

Few outstanding men in history have wielded their authority in such secrecy or have expected so few worldly rewards as Christian Stockmar. The limelight was anathema to him, power the incentive of his life. The fact that, with this power he dominated Prince Albert, through him the Queen and thus exercised an incalculable influence over the history of England during the nineteenth century, makes it appear so strange and illogical that, although we have honoured amongst others Messieurs Silhouette, Chauvin and Guillotine, Captain Boycott, Burke and Lord Yarborough, the name of Baron Stockmar is not included in the English Dictionary.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“Coburg is the stud farm of Europe.”

BISMARCK

THE recovery which Leopold had made when Victoria visited him in September did not last beyond the beginning of the new year of 1863, and by March, the King was again in great agony. Forgetting the previous relief, he wrote that month: “I have now been thirteen months suffering the most atrocious pain,” and later, “I try to subdue my tempers; that is anything but easy. . . .” Fortunately in the spring, Leopold was treated by a new surgeon, an Englishman, who later became well known as Sir Henry Thompson, and after another series of painful operations on his bladder, the King again made a remarkable recovery.

The wedding in March of the Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra was naturally a great consolation to Leopold during the earlier part of his renewed illness, and he much enjoyed the description he received from the Queen of how she welcomed “dear Alix looking like a rose,” at the bottom of the staircase at Windsor, and how, “Alix wore a grey dress, with a violet jacket trimmed with fur, and a white bonnet.” Three days later, on March 10th, the great ceremony itself could be recorded by the Queen; how she walked into the “Royal Closet,” a balcony on the Gospel side of St. George’s Chapel, and “sat down feeling strange and bewildered,” how “Dearest Albert’s Chorale was sung, which affected me much,” and how, at the close of the marriage service, “the young couple looked up at me, and I gave them an affectionate nod and kissed my hand to sweet Alix.” Later, from a window at the Castle, the Queen saw them

leave for the honeymoon, "Darling Alix looking lovely in a white silk dress, lace shawl and white bonnet with orange flowers . . . then I drove . . . down to the Mausoleum, and prayed by that beloved resting-place, feeling soothed and calmed." With this marriage, Leopold might well be satisfied, for after that between Victoria and Albert, it proved the most satisfactory alliance he had ever arranged.

Despite her bereavement and her uncle's severe illness during 1863, the Queen was not deterred from indulging in an occasional sharp and determined note in her correspondence with Leopold, when occasion demanded. For instance, General Grey visited her uncle in the early part of the year, and gave him the most rosy report of his niece's health. Tactlessly in a letter, Leopold congratulated her on the welcome news and the Queen wrote a most indignant reply : "How good Grey could give you a good account of me is indeed marvellous, for I have been very unwell the whole time I have been at home, and have hardly been a day free from headache and nervous pains, but this gentleman sees me only on business, and when I talk I get excited and flushed and very feverish, and that *they* call being well." At the end of this letter, the Queen suddenly remembered that her uncle was really ill and added abruptly : "Thank God ! General Grey says you look well, which is wonderful, with such constant suffering." It is improbable that Leopold was as outraged as the Queen by the General's report that he appeared in good health, but it must have occurred to him that his niece's refusal to admit the possibility of mental recovery from Albert's death had now been extended as well to her physical condition.

The Queen's indignation with her uncle on the subject of health, did not, however, prevent her from interfering in his family affairs. She was at the time much disturbed by the behaviour of Leopold's second son, Philip, Count of Flanders, who, although twenty-six years of age, declined to be forced into matrimony. In a letter to her uncle, Victoria admitted that she had "written to him in very strong terms about his marrying," and censured his general conduct by remarking : "he laughs and ridicules

everyone, and wishes to live only for himself." But despite the persistent nagging of his formidable first cousin, young Philip managed to prolong his care-free existence for another four years, when he consented to marry Princess Marie of Hohenzollern, and eventually became the father of King Albert of the Belgians.

The year 1864, the penultimate year of Leopold's life, witnessed the emergence into the full European limelight of two international problems of outstanding importance, which, for some time, occupied the anxious attention of both the Queen and her uncle. The first in significance was the question of Schleswig-Holstein, the second, the establishment in Mexico of an imperial regime. The former was, undoubtedly, one of the most complex and controversial problems of the whole nineteenth century, and it has often been related, that when Lord Palmerston, at this time Prime Minister, was invited by a high authority to give his views on this vital subject, he made the witty but unsatisfactory reply that only three people, to his knowledge, had ever been able clearly to comprehend this intricate business ; the Prince Consort, who was dead, a German professor, who had gone mad (probably Nietzsche), and he himself, who had forgotten all about it ! The student of history, therefore, who attempts to elucidate the Schleswig-Holstein controversy is placed by Lord Palmerston in an invidious position, but since the matter nearly involved Europe in a general war, in which the Queen and her uncle would inevitably had participated, it is impossible to omit all reference to this tortuous problem.

Both the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein had long been governed by the King of Denmark, although Holstein was wholly and Schleswig partially German. All Austrian and German protests in the past had been powerless to alter this highly unjust arrangement, which had received European ratification by the Treaty of London in 1852. The death, however, of King Frederick VII of Denmark in 1863 and the accession, through the female line, of Christian IX, the father of the Princess of Wales, brought matters to a crisis, as the Duchies could only be inherited through the male line. The rightful heir, the Duke of

Augustenburg-Holstein, was bought off with £350,000, and, at the same time, Schleswig was incorporated in the Kingdom of Denmark.

Naturally, Germany could not tolerate this cavalier treatment of the rights and privileges of the German peoples in Schleswig and Holstein, and in January of the following year, Prussia and Austria, under the leadership of Bismarck, presented a joint ultimatum to Denmark, requiring that the future of the two Duchies should be left in their hands. On its rejection, the German powers invaded Schleswig to enforce their demands. Inevitably, it was a very one-sided war, which, after an abortive conference in the middle, ended in the alienation of both Duchies from Denmark.

Naturally, these events were carefully and anxiously watched by the Queen and her uncle, who both took a temperate though pro-German point of view. The English public, however, became wildly inflamed against what was considered to be the brutal aggression of the German powers on weak and defenceless little Denmark. This puerile display of sentiment was supported both by Palmerston and Russell who, in the early months of 1864, were extremely anxious that England should intervene on the side of Denmark. The Queen, however, refused to be dictated to by "those two dreadful old men," as she referred to her Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in a letter to her uncle, and there can be little doubt that it was almost entirely due to her firm and far-seeing policy, that England was not precipitated into a war against the united forces of Austria and Germany; a war in which she could have gained no territorial advantages or even moral prestige, and in which, on the military side, she might easily have suffered defeat. Rarely, if ever, did the Queen serve her country more brilliantly than by preserving its neutrality during the Schleswig-Holstein war.

In her determination to remain neutral, Victoria was strongly supported by Leopold, who realised that, if England was engaged in a war in Denmark, a unique opportunity would be presented to the Emperor of the French to attack his kingdom, and by renewing his alliance with the Queen by invading Germany on the Rhine,

England might find it difficult, as an ally, to prevent Napoleon annexing the Rhine Provinces and Belgium as well. The King discovered an additional reason for England not to declare war on Austria and Germany in his conviction that, but for the timely intervention of those powers, the Duchies would have been submerged in revolution. This disturbing possibility only existed in Leopold's imagination, but the bogey of revolution grew yearly in stature in the King's ageing mind.

In the negotiations and communications preceding the final determination of the English Government not to enter into the Danish war, Leopold took an active share and even embarked on a correspondence with Lord Palmerston with a view to moderating the bellicose opinions of the veteran statesman. Presumably "Pam" must have appeased the King with tactful replies, since the latter wrote to his niece this rare if not unique sentence of praise about her Prime Minister: "How clear and strong that mind remains; may he be long preserved to be a Minister!" The Queen, however, did not altogether share her uncle's chameleon views on Lord Palmerston, for she wrote a little later: "Pilgerstein is gouty, and extremely impertinent in his communications of different kinds to me."

Apart from corresponding with Lord Palmerston on the grave issues of the war, Leopold considered it to be his duty to point out to his niece the unfortunate cause of Denmark's favour with the English public. This he ascribed almost entirely to the great and universal popularity of the Prince of Wales and his Danish wife. His letter made unpalatable reading for the Queen for political as well as for personal reasons: "Our own dreadful loss put Bertie and Alix forward," he wrote, referring, of course, to the death of the Prince Consort: "He and his wife are constantly before the public in *every imaginable shape and character*, and entirely fill the public mind." He continued his letter with a sagacious judgment of the English character: "The English are very personal; to continue to love people they must see them, and even in part touch them." The hint could hardly have been broader; the place of the

Queen in the hearts of the English people had, owing to her self-imposed effacement, been usurped by the young and attractive Prince and Princess of Wales. The stern declaration of the Prince Consort, who had feared political complications with Denmark: "We take the Princess, but not her relations," had been bravely disregarded by the people of England, who, through their unbounded enthusiasm for their radiant Princess, had come to espouse with eager but unwarranted sympathy the cause of her courageous but misguided country. Indeed, as Leopold wrote to the Queen, no one dreamt that this, "charming Princess . . . would become a source of difficulties for England, and perhaps the cause of a popular war against Prussia."

Undoubtedly the Queen realised that her daughter-in-law, at the time, was a political encumbrance, but, being a woman, it would concern her more that the Princess of Wales and not herself was becoming the popular figure-head of England. Her uncle's letter worked like magic on the Queen's determination. A fortnight later, Her Majesty drove through the Park in an open carriage and four, to the station. It was her first public drive since the death of the Prince Consort. Her description of her reception by the crowd must have satisfied and possibly amused her cynical uncle: "Everyone said that the difference shown, when I appeared, and when Bertie and Alix drive, was not to be described. Naturally, for them no one stops, or runs, as they always did, and do doubly now, for me."

The second international problem which, in 1864 personally interested the Queen and her uncle, was the establishment of an Empire in Mexico under the Archduke Maximilian of Austria, an event of special concern to Leopold as the father of the new Empress. Since 1861, Mexican affairs had become of European interest owing to the failure of that Government to discharge its obligations to foreign investors, and England, France and Spain had agreed that year to armed intervention on behalf of their nationals. But a short time after the inception of these operations, France was left in the lurch by her two collaborators. Admiral Dunlop and General Prim were

instructed by their respective governments to withdraw their forces from Vera Cruz through fear of exacerbating the feelings of the Northern States of America. Besides, had not Lord Palmerston referred to Mexico as a "witches' cauldron," and angrily described its inhabitants as an "effete and mongrel population"?

Undaunted, however, by these judicious desertions, Napoleon gladly pursued alone "*la gloire française*" in the New World, and despatched a strong army overseas, under the command of General Bazaine, whose name is more readily connected with Metz than with Mexico. A considerable proportion of these forces were Zouaves, and it is interesting to note, in view of the more recent use by the French of black troops in a far more civilised country than Mexico, that their arrival at Vera Cruz instantly caused the most angry resentment amongst the inhabitants, until then only mildly astonished by the activities of the French, and laid the foundations of that bitter hostility to foreigners which sealed Maximilian's fate before he ever set foot on Mexican soil.

Not unnaturally, under the circumstances, the presence of French troops proved insufficient to restore good government to Mexico and also in view of the chaotic political conditions there, Napoleon decided that the only means of subduing the savage passions of the rival partisans was to establish an hereditary monarchy to rule them. A Catholic Prince had, of course, to be chosen to fill the onerous position and, with a view to conciliating Austrian susceptibilities, still sensitive after the Peace of Villafranca, Napoleon suggested to Francis Joseph that his brother the Archduke Maximilian, who had frequently expressed his admiration for the Emperor of the French, would make an admirable Emperor of Mexico.

It would not appear that the Archduke was ever particularly anxious to assume this responsibility. He was a quiet and cultured man, devoted to his wife, although they were childless, and he was reluctant to abandon his comfortable crenellated villa at Miramar, on a promontory by Trieste, for the whirl and confusion of a Mexican throne. Others, however, in close proximity to the Archduke, thought differently. The first amongst these

was his wife, Charlotte, the second, her father, King Leopold.

Charlotte's personality in history is somewhat obscured by the forceful characters of her father and brother Leopold II, and also by the fact that, at the age of twenty-six, she became totally insane. Her doll-like face and modest mien, however, appear to have concealed a determined and ambitious nature like her father. Contemporaries asserted that as a child, she nurtured day-dreams of becoming Empress of Austria, and the marriage of Francis Joseph to Elizabeth of Bavaria only strengthened her resolve to become an Empress herself. At any rate, Leopold in a letter to his niece stated, that Charlotte was very venturesome, "and would go with Max. to the end of the world."

The attitude of Leopold himself towards Napoleon's project of making his son-in-law the Emperor of Mexico was at first ambiguous. Naturally he distrusted the source of the suggestion and wondered what Napoleon hoped to get out of the adventure himself. Then he was persuaded by his daughter to make some preliminary investigations in England and elsewhere, to discover on what general assistance Maximilian could rely. These were definitely discouraging: despite his influence over Victoria, the English Government declined to offer more than moral support, nor could he induce either France or England to recognise the Southern States of America, which he rightly regarded as an essential foundation for the stability of the Mexican Empire. A strong and united America, he knew, would never tolerate a European Empire within the orbit of the Monroe doctrine. Why, therefore, did the sagacious Leopold give his blessing to this mad-cap adventure in a turbulent and hostile country, which had been initiated by his enemy Napoleon, lacked all English support and which was certain to meet with active opposition from America? The answer is two-fold; his aspirations for his daughter Charlotte, in whose capabilities he had great belief, and his own declining mental powers, in which prudence and judgment had been obscured by age, and only vanity and ambition remained undimmed.

Accordingly, in the spring of 1864, with the enthusiastic

concurrence of both Napoleon and Leopold, the Archduke Maximilian accepted the imperial crown, and he and Charlotte sailed for Mexico in the Austrian battleship, *Novara*. The well-known story of the young couple in their inhospitable empire is one of the most tragic in the history of the nineteenth century. Maximilian found that his rule was detested by the majority of his subjects who only submitted so long as it was supported by French bayonets. After the victory of the Federal States in 1865, strong pressure was put on Napoleon to remove his troops. The triumph of the Northern States, as Leopold had foreseen, now imperilled the existence of Maximilian's Empire. Appalled by the prospect of being deprived of the French army, the Empress Charlotte, the following year, returned to Europe, and in vain implored Napoleon not to desert her husband. She then made her famous and melodramatic visit to the Pope, when, on the inevitable failure of her attempt to secure material papal aid, she declined to leave the Vatican, spending there the night, in the company of two nuns, under the impression that the Emperor of the French was trying to poison her. From this unconventional retreat, the Empress of Mexico emerged insane.

The following year Napoleon withdrew his troops from Mexico, and on June 19th, Maximilian, after a pathetic and vain resistance, was captured at Querétaro by President Juárez and shot. Charlotte's insanity was by then so complete that the news could easily be withheld from her, and until 1927, when she died at the age of eighty-six, there lived in the Belgian Château of Bouchout, three miles from Laeken, a mad and wizened little figure, who called herself the Empress of Mexico and often talked proudly of her handsome husband with the golden beard, who had died in his Empire a short while ago, in the full exercise of his sovereignty.

Leopold's only daughter, an Empress in exile, lived to witness the fall of six other historic dynasties after her own; the Bonapartes in 1870, the Braganzas in Brazil in 1889, the Braganzas in Portugal in 1910, and the Romanoffs, Hapsburgs and Hohenzollerns during the Great War. At the beginning of the latter conflict, the German army

streamed past the gates of Château Bouchout on which a sympathetic command erected this notice : " This Castle . . . is occupied by Her Majesty the Empress of Mexico, sister-in-law of our revered ally the Emperor of Austria. German soldiers are ordered to pass by without singing, and to leave the place untouched." It was the last recognition Charlotte received during her life-time of the imperial crown she had lost nearly half a century before.

Leopold was mercifully spared the humiliation and suffering of knowing that his daughter had gone mad and his son-in-law had been executed. Had he lived another two years, he would have been a powerless spectator of both tragedies, and his bitterness against Napoleon, the prime instigator of the Mexican adventure, would have been increased a hundredfold. The indisputable fact that Leopold was partly responsible for this hazardous and ill-judged enterprise was only less remarkable than the striking coincidence that it united for the first and only time in cordial agreement the divergent political views of those mutually hostile sovereigns, Napoleon and Leopold. Certainly, the former emerged from the disaster with less family scars than the House of Coburg and, if Napoleon had entertained any desire for a dramatic vengeance on Leopold for fifteen years of cavilling opposition, he was now amply repaid. But the King's death two years before Maximilian's execution and his own immense loss of European prestige, through the mortifying collapse of the Mexican Empire, probably deprived Napoleon of any revengeful satisfaction. Undoubtedly Leopold was spared much by a timely death and, although he was as a result, denied the supreme consolation of witnessing Napoleon's ignominious end at Sedan, it would never have compensated his vanity or pride for his share in the empiric Empire of Mexico, where he crowned his life's work with a gigantic failure.

But in the spring of 1864, Leopold was intoxicated with the prospect of his daughter's imperial throne, while in England an event of great family importance had recently occurred. On January 8th, the Princess of Wales gave birth prematurely to her first child, a son, later known as the Duke of Clarence, who died in 1892. Naturally, the

news of the birth of this important great-great-nephew, the eventual heir to the English throne, was received with deep interest at Laeken, and Leopold was much flattered when invited to act as one of the sponsors to the baby. Probably the King guessed that he owed this honour entirely to his niece, who had been, in fact, most insistent with the Prince of Wales that her uncle should be chosen, while, in the same letter in which she made known this wish to her son, the Queen also wrote that if any further names besides Albert Victor were given to the child, that of Uncle Leopold must be the first selection. The Prince of Wales, however, had the temerity to disregard his mother's request. Additional names were indeed given to his first-born, but that of the King of the Belgians did not feature amongst them.

When, in the following year on June 3rd, the Princess of Wales gave birth to her second son, the last great-great-nephew whose birth Leopold was destined to see, the Queen was again most active regarding the choice of names for the infant. Her son's preference for George, for the first name by no means met with her approval. ". . . I fear I cannot admire the names you propose to give the Baby," she wrote firmly on June 13th. ". . . Frederick is, however, the best of the two, and I hope you will call him so ; George only came over with the Hanoverian family." The Queen forgot that the name of Frederick was equally alien to the English Royal family, before the accession of the House of Hanover, and while George had been the first name of the first four Kings of that house, Frederick had only once been borne by the heir to the throne, in the person of Frederick, Prince of Wales, the father of George III. Whether the Queen's son was influenced in his choice of names by such historical reflections is unknown, but at any rate he again had the courage to ignore his mother's wishes and the names of the late King of England were George Frederick Ernest Albert. No doubt the Queen accepted this selection with equanimity since, in the same letter in which she expressed her hope that the infant's first name should be Frederick, she added indulgently : " However, if the dear child grows up good and wise, I shall not mind what his name is."

During these lengthy discussions on the most suitable names for the Prince of Wales' sons, on one occasion the Queen took the opportunity of referring to the title which her son would take when he succeeded to the throne. His first two names were Albert Edward, and his mother wrote : " I wish to repeat, that it was beloved Papa's wish, as well as mine, that you should be called by both when you became King, and it would be impossible for you to drop your Father's. It would be monstrous, and Albert alone, as you truly and amiably say, would not do, as there can only be one *Albert* ! " The Queen continued her letter by pointing out to the Prince of Wales that on his accession he would begin a new line like the Tudors and Hanoverians, " for it will be the Saxe-Coburg line, united with the Brunswick, and the two united names will mark it, in the way we all wish. . . . " When nearly forty years later, the Prince of Wales at last succeeded to his mother's throne, he had not forgotten that there could be, " only one Albert," and true Hanoverian as he was, he perpetuated in the English Royal Family the name of the Queen's father, Edward, Duke of Kent, in preference to that of her " Beloved Angel."

Besides the pleasure of being invited to act as sponsor to the Prince of Wales' eldest son, in the following spring Leopold was asked for his opinion by the Queen of the projected alliance of her daughter, Princess Helena to Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, a younger brother of the Duke of Augustenburg. It would not appear that the King initiated this romance, but rather the Princess Royal, who sent her mother a photograph of the Prince from Berlin, and a full account of his mental and physical qualifications. Apparently he was fond of children, spoke English, possessed a " military tournure," and a far better figure than his elder brother. The Princess Royal added : " He is very amusing when he chooses. We like him very much. He is almost bald. . . . " The Queen hastened to pass on this lively information to her uncle and asked for his " dear opinion." It must have been favourable, since the marriage took place despite cantankerous opposition from Berlin, which was exceptionally galling to the Princess Royal, who was largely responsible for the

alliance. Bismarck objected on political grounds, and saw in this match an English intrigue in favour of the dispossessed House of Augustenburg. But the Queen was unmoved by Bismarck's displeasure, of whose general conduct she highly disapproved, and she wrote angrily to her uncle : " Odious people the Prussians are, that I must say."

Prussian activities, under the guidance of Bismarck, who had become Chancellor in 1863, were also a source of constant alarm and irritation to Leopold, always a warm admirer of Austria, during the last two years of his life. He feared Bismarck's ruthless policy of closing Parliament, and suppressing the liberty of the Press, and consequently he was a keen supporter of the Crown Prince and his wife in their tactless but determined opposition to the " wicked man," as the Chancellor was called by the Princess Royal. Leopold was well aware that Bismarck regarded Belgium as an admirable bait to secure Napoleon's neutrality in the event of war between Prussia and Austria, while the German Chancellor knew, despite his cynical assertion to the contrary, that should the Emperor of the French decide to occupy Belgium, he would inevitably be embroiled in a war with England.

Leopold's disapproval of Prussian behaviour was indeed so fully shared by his niece that, when she visited Coburg in August, to unveil a statue of the Prince Consort, she made every attempt to avoid a meeting with the Prussian King. But when this proved futile and circumstances and etiquette demanded that the Queen should receive the King in Darmstadt, she wrote afterwards in her Journal ; ". . . we talked of nothing but ' pluie et beau temps,' and he left again in less than half an hour." No doubt the actual unveiling of Albert's statue considerably compensated Victoria for this unwelcome interview, and she wrote afterwards to Leopold about the ceremony that, " nothing ever was better done, and nothing was more felt. . . . The statue itself is beautiful and so like." In her Journal on the same day, she noted with sad satisfaction : " Never since Vicky's marriage had our nine children been assembled together, and now they were all together, and the Head of all was missing ! " The spectacle

of the Queen of England and her entire family grouped round the heroic figure of their Prince must have been highly flattering to the susceptibilities of the unpretentious citizens of Coburg. But from the picturesque and historical point of view it was very unfortunate that "Uncle Leopold" was absent.

Bismarck and the affairs of Europe were not the King's sole preoccupations during his last years of life. The Continent of America played an increasing part in his activities, and it is greatly to Leopold's credit, that with his ageing faculties, he was prepared to grapple with the problems of the New World, although, in the case of the Mexican Empire, his intervention proved eventually disastrous. But contemporary with the inception of this adventure, the King was invited to arbitrate in a dispute between England and Brazil. After mature deliberation, Leopold gave his decision in favour of the last actual European Empire in America, on which he bestowed a further benefaction by marrying his great-nephew "Gusty" to Princess Leopoldine, a daughter of the Emperor Pedro II of Brazil. The alliance of this young Coburg Prince of twenty, whom Leopold had been so anxious to raise to the throne of Greece, with this Brazilian Princess, was the last and including his own, constituted the tenth royal marriage for which the King was directly responsible. No doubt Leopold must have been keenly aware of the honour he was conferring on the American Continent, as represented by Brazil and Mexico, by this generous gift of two members of the House of Coburg.

The skill and impartiality with which the King had settled the dispute between England and Brazil subsequently caused the United States to invite his arbitration between that country and Spain. That Leopold did not function as required on this occasion was probably due to his increasing infirmities, which, however, did not prevent him from taking a lively interest in the relations between England and the United States during the last year of his life. The close of the American Civil War, in favour of the Northern States, was followed by a renewal of the tension between them and Great Britain owing to counter claims for damage to shipping during the war. Arbitra-

tion, suggested by the States, was refused by England and, although matters were eventually amicably arranged, in the early spring it appeared as if war between the two countries was almost inevitable. The vulnerable position of Canada became in consequence a matter of much concern to the Queen and her Government, and it was generally felt that England might be unable to hold that Dominion.

The attitude of Victoria towards this critical problem was both fatalistic and singular, although it was founded on an early opinion of the Prince Consort and no doubt received her uncle's approval. In February, she confided to her journal her impression that Canada might be lost to England, "but we must struggle for it," the Queen contended, and added: ". . . far the best would be to let it go as an independent kingdom under an English Prince!" Admitting that "dearest Albert had often thought of the colonies for our sons, but that I had disliked the idea," she then considered which of the young Princes might be suitable for the position. "For Alfred," she wrote firmly, "it would not do. For Arthur (later the Duke of Connaught) it might be different." The reason for this adamant disqualification of the future Duke of Edinburgh may be accounted for by a statement made by the Prince Consort a few months previous to his death; "He (Prince Alfred, then a midshipman) will have to go through a hard school if he is not to perish." Neither of these great-nephews was, however, destined to become "King of Canada," much as Leopold would have no doubt rejoiced over such an unexpected elevation, and his niece forgot her anxiety for the future of Canada in her horror at the assassination of President Lincoln, writing nervously to her uncle: "One never heard of such a thing! I only hope it will not be catching elsewhere."

Meanwhile Leopold's health was fast declining. Besides a return of the old malady in his bladder, his eyes began to cause the King much pain, and his niece insisted on receiving a daily bulletin of his condition from Dr. Jenner, whom she had sent to Laeken to attend to him. Increased pain and debility, however, did not change Leopold's cynical views with regard to doctors, whose motives and

prescriptions he distrusted as much as ever. Before long his imprudent behaviour was reported by Jenner to the Queen, who wrote to her uncle, at the end of April, expressing her great concern that he did not in the beginning follow the doctor's advice, "and did not take enough nourishment, which would have prevented all this sinking and weakness! Beloved uncle!" she continued, "I earnestly and seriously entreat you never to neglect the doctor's advice again, and to think how valuable your life is for all Europe, not to speak of me and your children."

Leopold was more willing to obey the doctor when he recommended a visit to Ostend than on matters of medicine and diet. The old King loved this seaside resort, although he never wished to embellish it with a full-size copy of the Palazzo Vecchio at Florence, an enormity which death only prevented his son Leopold II from perpetrating, fifty years later. But the elder Leopold was quite content with the modest proportions of Ostend, where he affected the most engaging simplicity, mixing freely with his people on the promenade, dressed in a shabby old black frock-coat, and always armed with a strong pair of binoculars so that no pretty face might elude his eager but fading vision.

About this time a Brussels magistrate of the name of Faider wrote an interesting description of the King, which, although not unbiased, was perspicacious and, in general, true. "Though much tired by lingering pain, he had . . . the old kingly bearing . . . I was, as I always have been, struck with that cold but courteous kindness which marked his official relations. . . . I had always observed in this extraordinary man . . . a mixture of passionateness and easy-goingness (*sic*) . . . a quiet gaiety couched in picturesque language; irony, sometimes sharp but always without bitterness. . . . He never injured anybody; he had no feeling of vengeance." M. Faider added: "His anger was terrible, and at such times his sharp, deep eye, a little veiled, was filled with piercing flashes. . . . He was naturally indulgent . . . he never authorised an execution without long hesitation and cruel anguish." It is, on the whole, a pleasant picture of the ageing King.

Leopold's mental resistance to his increasing physical

weakness was seriously enfeebled in October by an event which, although not unexpected, appeared to the King and, indeed, proved to be the harbinger of his own death. Lord Palmerston, while Prime Minister for the second time, and after more than fifty years of office, died in the proverbial harness at Brocket, on the eighteenth. Two days later the Queen announced the news to her uncle in restrained and dispassionate terms. The death of "Lord Palmerston, alias Pilgerstein," she referred to as being "very striking," and although she admitted grudgingly that he had possessed many valuable qualities, she hastened to add: "But I never liked him, or could ever the least respect him, nor could I forget his conduct on certain occasions to my Angel."

To the Queen, who was entirely objective, it never occurred to speculate on Lord Palmerston's probable reactions towards her and the Prince Consort. Inevitably she distrusted this Regency importation into the Victorian age with his robust conceptions of public and private morality and his disconcerting cynicism, so alien to the Queen's unsubtle mind; but Victoria forgot, when she condemned his independent behaviour in foreign affairs, and his occasional cavalier treatment of herself and Albert, that Lord Palmerston had held office ten years before either of them had been born, and that in consequence he had often found it almost unendurable to be dictated to in international politics by a boy and girl of foreign blood, who had only recently emerged from the schoolroom.

Leopold, on first hearing of "Pilgerstein's" death, is reported to have remarked with melancholy composure that he would shortly follow his stubborn contemporary to the grave, but he wrote to his niece calmly although somewhat obscurely: "Lord Palmerston is a great change," and after making an exception of his treatment of "poor King Louis Philippe" he added that he had never experienced any difficulties with Palmerston, "the less so as he was one of that small party faithful to Canning, whom I had always found very friendly." Greece, "Prinny," Lady Ellenborough, Caroline Bauer, pale memories of the unsatisfactory 'twenties, must have been conjured up for Leopold in the wake of Canning, whose

mantle, on his death in 1827, had fallen on Palmerston's capacious shoulders. But in this sudden impartiality towards the dead statesman, the King either gave a proof of a failing memory or else showed a commendable ability to forget past dissensions and injuries. In either case, "Pilgerstein's" death meant for Leopold the removal of the last of his great contemporaries in England, with the exception of Lord John Russell, an unpleasant reminder of the passing years, although he probably felt some secret pride that, of the monarchs and statesmen of his generation, the King of the Belgians alone remained.

A further cause of more justifiable satisfaction must have been given to Leopold if he was informed of the remarkable compliment paid to him by Lord Palmerston on his death-bed. It appeared that, during a brief coherent moment before the end, the dying Prime Minister was heard to murmur: "The treaty with Belgium! Ah! . . . Read me the sixteenth clause again. . . ." His grandson, Mr. Ashley, hastily brought a copy of the treaty to his bedside and read aloud the article which guaranteed the independence and neutrality of Belgium. These were probably the last words Lord Palmerston heard on earth.

EPILOGUE

“The human race is a sad creation, and I trust that the other planets are better organised and that we shall get there hereafter.”

LEOPOLD TO VICTORIA

AFTER Lord Palmerston's death, as he had anticipated, Leopold went into a rapid decline. Nevertheless, in October, despite his failing eyesight and his immensely swollen feet, which had borne more than one operation, the King had insisted on going shooting in the Ardennes, although he was never allowed to leave his carriage. These sporting activities, however, were no enjoyment, but rather a torment to the pain-racked Leopold and, at the end of November he returned to Laeken, where he took permanently to his bed, although his subjects were still unaware of their King's serious condition. “I grow old,” said Leopold, “I can say with truth I have been a successful King.”

Alone, except for the company of his favourite valet, and still spurning the attentions of his doctors, the King fought desperately to forget his approaching end. Religion had played no part in his life, and he was too sceptical, perhaps too proud, earnestly to seek its unfamiliar consolations on his death-bed. Instead, he accumulated a mass of light literature which was read aloud to him hours on end during the day, even during the night, while the only interruption he welcomed to this frivolous narcotic was the services of a musician, who, hidden behind a curtain in an alcove in the bedroom, played at stated intervals the favourite compositions of the King. This pleasure, however, was no recent innovation to divert Leopold's thoughts from death since, for the last five years of his life, he had insisted on the daily performances of this pianist. With increasing age his love of music had grown

ever more enthusiastic, although with a strange perversity, he had always declined to make the acquaintance of this artist to whom he owed much pleasure and consolation and who had sat at his piano day after day for five years in the same room as himself.

The source of this astonishing piece of information is a contemporary number of a Parisian newspaper called the *Feuilletoniste*, which added that shortly before the King's death the pianist announced to the Major-domo his intention of getting married and modestly asked for one day's leave. The horrified official repeated this request to Leopold, who, despite the excellent excuse, selfishly declined to give his permission to a proposal which would deprive him of a whole day's musical enjoyment. In consequence the love-sick pianist was compelled to get married during a brief pause in the daily concert. This disedifying story, although suspect, as being recounted with considerable relish by Caroline Bauer, provides at least in its first part, a further proof of Leopold's insistence on his "invisibility" when ill, and of his morbid fear that anyone might gaze, with pitying eyes, on the seared and emaciated features of the King.

His niece, Victoria, however, had been fully informed of her uncle's serious condition, and early in December she sent Dr. Jenner to Brussels with a letter which he was instructed to convey personally to the King. For a whole week, by Leopold's orders, the famous physician was compelled to wait with his royal missive, before he was admitted to the sick-room. But when at last he was allowed to approach the patient, his condition was past human remedy. A few incoherent words, perhaps of gratitude, were all that could pass his lips. The King had only three more days to live.

Speech and movement were now beyond his failing powers, but Leopold's mind may still have been acute and clear and able to range with accurate facility over the triumphs and sorrows of his eventful life. His obscure childhood, his failure with Napoleon, Stockmar . . . his sudden leap into fame in England, "Young Frog," the Great Crimson Room at Carlton House, the idyll at Claremont, the pitiable death scene, his abject misery,

Stockmar . . . Countess Ficquelmont, Lady Ellenborough, the Grecian muddle, the mirage of Charlotte in Caroline Bauer, at last a "Majesty," the censorious "Celsissimus," poor insipid and obedient Louise-Mary, his grandest achievement, Victoria and Albert, aided by Stockmar . . . "good" Louis Philippe, incalculable "Pilgerstein," the imperial monster, Louis Napoleon, Vicky and Fritz, the bitterness of Albert's death, followed by another, significant, but awaited, Stockmar . . . Bertie and Alix, Charlotte in Mexico, Frau Meyer von Eppinghoven, another death, Palmerston, the forerunner of his own? No, he would hold his own against death as he had against the world, armed with that simple maxim, "Never relax," Stocky's favourite . . . that good, fearless, untiring, zealous friend . . . Stockmar . . .

Leisurely he summed up his achievements, as the invisible pianist apathetically drummed out an air from Mozart or a Handel Minuet. "La grande affaire, c'est le succès," well, it had been his. . . . For nearly fifty years, with one unmerited, embittering reverse, the death of Charlotte. A personal, a family, a European success. . . . Had he not seated a member of the House of Coburg on every available throne, with the solitary and vexing exception of Greece? And when prejudice and circumstances had hindered a further expansion of his House, had he not offered the most copious and excellent advice to every crowned head in Europe? Recklessly or obstinately, sometimes it had been certainly ignored, but with what result? Inevitably revolution or war. . . . In Germany, Austria, Italy, France, revolution in '48, war in Italy the same year, war in the Crimea, again in Italy in '59, now in Schleswig-Holstein. . . . Even his niece Victoria had unaccountably spurned his advice on one, or was it two, occasions? But she, as well as the warring nations, had learnt their lesson, now he was universally acclaimed as the "Justice of the Peace for Europe!" Belgium, in particular, had reason to be eternally grateful to her first King. Had he not made of a Dutch Province an independent, virile Kingdom, enjoying international respect for prosperity and stability, and protected from aggression by European agreement? Above all, had he not by tireless energy, astute diplomacy

and by his self-sacrificing and disinterested policy preserved Europe from a general war for over thirty years? The music stopped, the King relaxed on his pillows. Was he not justified when he said to Victoria: "Politically, I have worked for God"?

The Queen saw Dr. Jenner immediately on his arrival at Windsor from Laeken. He did not apparently inform her that her uncle's condition was hopeless, for in her journal on the seventh, Victoria noted: "If uncle took the necessary nourishment prescribed, he might pull through. He has to take brandy every hour and broth every two hours. All this reminds me too painfully of beloved Albert's terrible illness." Her parallel with the Prince Consort's last days proved appropriate, and it is curious that both nephew and uncle should have been given the identical and unavailing treatment on their death-beds. Two days later the Queen wrote in her journal: "Lenchen (Princess Christian) came in with a telegram while I was dressing. It had come in the night, and the words were: 'le roi mourant.' Dear Feodore breakfasted and sat with me and I clasped her in my arms, saying we must keep together, for soon we should be standing alone."

At Laeken the last scene was being played. "Invisible" as ever, the dying King had given the strictest instructions that nobody should approach him. But the Duchess of Brabant, obedient to his expressed desire that he should be informed when his last hour had come, after consultation with the doctors on the evening of the tenth, pushed aside the guard at his door, and kneeling at his bed-side, warned her father-in-law to prepare for the end. The King received this information with composure and resignation and consented to a brief intercourse with his chaplain, the Reverend Dr. Becker. After this unexpected interlude, the Duchess of Brabant returned to his side, to his great consolation, for his urgent request to her: "Don't leave me," was the last sentence formed by the King.

Then, in accordance with the barbaric customs of monarchy, the Presidents of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies and other dignitaries were introduced into the room to witness the dying agony of their King. His

dutiful and tearful family were now also admitted and grouped themselves in mournful attitudes around the august death-bed. Leopold lay supported in the arms of his eldest son, while one hand reached down to the kneeling Duchess of Brabant. The King appeared to be relieved of suffering, he neither struggled nor complained, but from his twitching lips there floated the faint murmur of a name: "Charlotte," he whispered, and again, "Charlotte." Had his mind wandered back through the dim recesses of the past to the trim lawns of Claremont and to the boisterous gambols of an English Princess, whom he had loved with such a tender passion? Or were his thoughts fixed on the tangible and thrilling present, on the career of his daughter Charlotte, now an Empress in the New World? Perhaps, in the confused mind of the dying King "Charlotte" symbolised both his earliest and deepest emotion and the fulfilment of the last great ambition of his life. At 11.45 Leopold was dead.

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The first King of the Belgians was given, as was proper, an imposing funeral. On December 12th, at nine o'clock in the evening, the body was removed from Laeken to the Palace in Brussels, where the lying-in-state took place in a hall adjoining the throne-room. There, for three days, Leopold's remains were exposed to the public gaze, lying in a coffin, covered with a pall of black velvet, embroidered with golden lions.

The funeral service was held on the 16th. At the head of the coffin stood Dr. Becker, and on either side were ranged twenty ministers of the Protestant faith; a rather incongruous company for one with Leopold's distaste for religion. At half-past ten, the doors of the throne-room were opened to admit the royal mourners. On the right of the new King, Leopold II, walked Louis I, King of Portugal, then came the Count of Flanders with the Prince of Wales. Numerous German royalties followed, including the Crown Prince of Prussia, the Archduke Joseph of Austria and "Gusty" of Coburg, while England was further represented by the Duke of Cambridge and the future Duke of Connaught, then fifteen years of age.

The tail of the procession was formed somewhat pathetically by the dethroned House of Orleans, in the persons of the late King's brothers-in-law, Joinville, Aumale and Nemours.

On reaching the room where the coffin lay, the royal mourners knelt at the foot of the catafalque, and Dr. Becker pronounced a funeral oration, extolling the rare virtues of the deceased King. The return journey was then made to Laeken through streets which were thronged with silent and respectful crowds. Every five minutes there sounded the boom of cannon. The houses and streets of Laeken were so richly laden with the emblems of mourning, that the town appeared as if enveloped in a sable pall.

Outside the Church of St. Mary, where Leopold was to be buried, a temporary religious edifice had been erected, tactfully described as a "temple"; a necessary construction, as it was clearly impossible, even in the case of a King, to carry out a Protestant burial service in a Catholic Church. Here the ministers of religion carried out the last rites, according to the Lutheran ritual, and then the body of the first King of the Belgians was brought into the Church and laid in the vault beside the body of his wife, Queen Louise-Marie.

In England, the Queen soon gave practical effect to the memory of her uncle and ordered two marble slabs to be engraved for erection in St. George's Chapel, one with the details of his rank and achievements, the other bearing the simple inscription: "This monument was raised by Queen Victoria to the memory of the Uncle who held the place of a father in her affections." It seemed a fitting conclusion to a great and successful career; buried in the heart of the country over which he had ruled with such justice and ability, and commemorated by the Queen of England in St. George's Chapel, where the grandiose monument to his beloved Charlotte was a permanent record of that brief and dazzling moment, when Leopold stood in an even closer relationship to the English throne.

But behind these decorous funeral and memorial arrangements in Belgium and England, which appeared to the world at large so appropriate and imposing, there

lay a profound tragedy, of which few in either country were aware. The Queen, in her journal on December 13th, disclosed its existence when referring to a letter she had received from the new King, "saying dearest Uncle had passed away quite peacefully in their arms." She then noted that the funeral was to take place on the 16th, and continued: "Felt anxious about this, knowing that beloved Uncle had repeatedly expressed his wish to be buried near Princess Charlotte, in St. George's Chapel, and that a letter to that effect, written to the Dean, was in existence. Dearest Albert had always spoken of it as a certainty . . ."

The Queen instantly decided to prevent this frustration of her uncle's wishes, and wrote to General Seymour in Brussels and to M. van de Weyer, the Belgian Minister in London, urging them to bring pressure to bear on the new King and his Government. But her well-intentioned efforts proved in vain, and she wrote in her journal two days later that she had seen M. van de Weyer, who had read to her a letter from Leopold II, "saying that dear uncle's wishes regarding his burial were known to them, but that there was no mention of them in his will, and that, even had there been, they could not have been complied with. For the sake of his memory, the Belgian people would never have consented. I could say no more, but feel it very much."

It is easy to exonerate Leopold II for this ruthless disregard of his father's most earnest wish, since no sympathy had existed between them and the dead King undoubtedly belonged more to Belgium than to England. But the former practice of removing the heart from the body of the deceased and burying it apart from the other remains would, in this instance, have made it possible for the heart of Leopold to rest by the side of the only woman he had ever truly loved, whose memory had been a lifelong inspiration, and whose name had caressed his lips on death.

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Few men with such outstanding achievements to their credit have died so little mourned as Leopold. Inevitably

old people do not leave behind them so many regrets as younger ones, since contemporaries by then are usually scarce and the sorrow of the younger generation, even of the children themselves, is alas, frequently academic. But, in the case of Leopold's children, this apathy was hardly unmerited, since, although a "good" father in the period and hypocritical sense of the word, he had entertained no sympathy nor affection for them, except in so far as they carried out his desires. For that reason he had been pleased with his eldest son for obediently marrying an Austrian archduchess, and with his daughter for her skill or complacency in marrying an archduke. Nor could his niece Victoria be expected to consider the loss of her uncle as irreparable as, naturally his influence with her had declined with advancing years and the calamity of Albert's death had blunted her capacities to repeat her earlier and abandoned outbursts of sorrow.

Did Leopold leave in the hearts of his people a real and abiding grief? It is doubtful. He was too correct, too infallible, almost too impeccable in their eyes to gain that wide popularity which is the inequitable reward of more human and frailer monarchs. Who then mourned the death of Leopold, first King of the Belgians? The answer lies in the spiritual rather than in the human sphere; the Soul of Europe, for Leopold was the greatest "European" of the nineteenth century. Circumstances early compelled him to shed the stifling prejudices of nationalism, character and vision saved him from the intolerant and narrow outlook of the majority of his fellow-men, and a throne enabled Leopold to shine as a brilliant international statesman under whose leadership, in happier world conditions, the Napoleonic conception of the "United States of Europe" might, from an Utopian ideal, have become a transcendent reality.

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